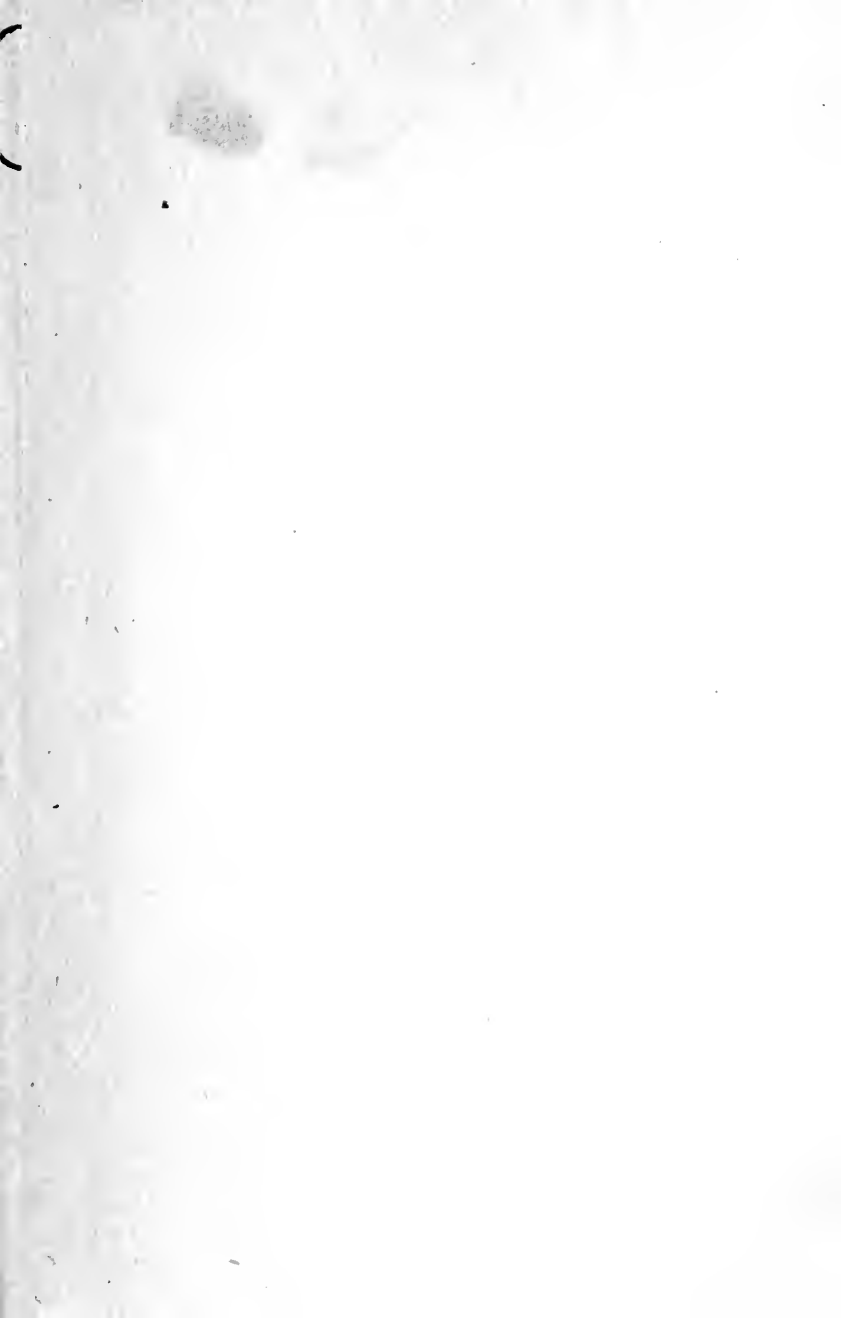


Inez
&
Trilby May
by
Sewell Ford

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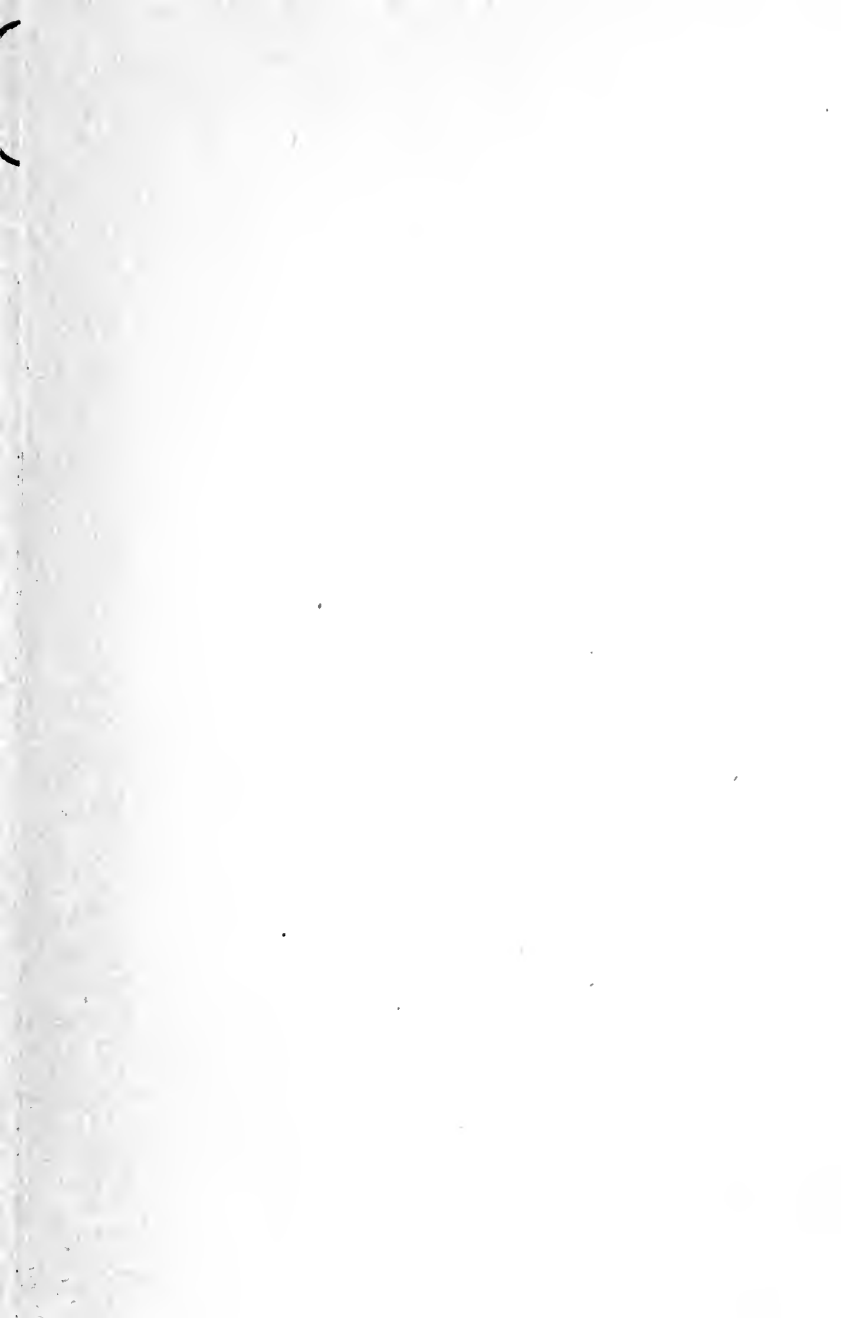






INEZ AND TRILBY MAY







[See p. 1

"WELL, INEZ," SAYS I, "YOU'VE GOT YOUR WISH. THIS
IS NEW YORK"

Inez and Trilby May

BY
SEWELL FORD

AUTHOR OF
TORCHY, SHORTY McCABE, Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
MARSHALL FRANTZ



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Chapter I

Meet Inez and Trilby May

“WELL, Inez,” says I, “you’ve got your wish. This is New York.”

“Y-es-s-s?” says Inez, blinking twice, but not missing her stroke on the gum.

So for a minute we stood there staring across Seventh Avenue at a big hotel, with our suitcases parked on the curb. And I’ll admit I was a bit disappointed in Inez.

“Of course,” says I, “I’m not looking for any landing of the Pilgrim Fathers exercises or expecting you to make an oration, but doesn’t it strike you that this one-syllable stuff of yours is kind of sketchy for the occasion?”

Which jogs Inez into eloquence. She rolls her big gray eyes at me solemn, shifts three cents’ worth of wintergreen flavor from right to left, and remarks, “Lotta noise.”

“As usual, Inez,” says I, “you have come

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through with the perfect description. It's a whale of a racket. Doesn't seem to be anything extra going on, either, so I expect it's just the regular big-town growl that we'll have to get used to. And here's another one of those taxi pirates that I've got to shoo off."

But he didn't shoo as easy as the other five. He almost grazes the toe of Inez's No. 9's with his front tire as he pulls up in front of us, holds out a stubby thumb, and asks, huskily, "Taxi, lady?"

"Thanks for the flattery, Buddy," says I, "but, honest now, after another good look, would you say we'd be the kind that was yearning to pay four bits for a ride in a wheezy tin Hank with wabby fenders?"

"Ahr, say, girlies, I'll make it right," says he, twisting his ugly face into what he thought would pass for a smile. "Where you goin'?"

"What's your choice, Inez," says I, "the Ritz or the New Ambassador? Two blinks. That's a sign, Buddy, that she hasn't made up her mind, so you'd better roll along before Lizzie's asthma gets worse."

He rolled, too, and before the next one could hail us I had dashed out and got a tall traffic cop to tell me how to find this furnished-room house that a friend of mine had given me the address of. We walked the whole eighteen

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blocks, so by the time we had climbed the brown-stone steps and been let into the storage vault that was being used as a reception parlor sitting came easy.

Making a trade with Miss Wellby, though, was another proposition. She wasn't the regular stage landlady you see in vaudeville sketches or read about in the *Saturday Evening Post*. You know—a multichrome blonde with a battle-ax profile, a cold, suspicious eye, and a voice like a saxophone at its worst. No. Miss Wellby seems to be a mild-spoken, gray-haired old maid with tired eyes and gentle manners. But she wasn't taking in a pair of cross-mated stray females like us just because it was a sporty thing to do. And the next I knew the third degree was well under way.

"Let me see," says she. "I suppose you have references?"

"Eh?" says I, catching my breath quick. "Oh yes. It was Miss Fipps, the day-shift cashier in Drout's, where we worked in Duluth, who referred us to you. She had a cousin, a perfect thirty-six in some waist department, who roomed here once. Miss Fipps got the number from her."

Miss Wellby indulged in a bored smile and shook her head. "Rather vague, isn't that?" she asks. "You see, I make it a rule not to

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rent my rooms to young women unless I know something about them; a good deal, in fact."

"If that's a cue for the story of our lives," says I, "here goes. It won't take long. I'm just Trilby May Dodge. Chuckle if you want to. They generally do. Paw named me after a book and an aunt. He was fond of books, paw was, and I have a hunch he threw in the May with a fond hope that auntie might loosen up on something he could put in the bank in my name. I don't know whether she left anything to me or not, but if she did I'll bet it didn't last long. Not if paw could get it out and spend it. He was that kind. His idea about dollars was that they were made round so they could roll along. Which is one of the seven mystic reasons why I have mighty little past and no future. You can see for yourself how short I am on looks; but if you're color blind I'll admit the pale carrotty hair, the moss-agate green eyes, and the rusty batik-effect where my complexion ought to be. I'm long on disposition, though, and my one fatal gift is conversation."

"Yes," says Miss Wellby, "I can discover no speech impediment. And your friend?"

"Inez Petersen," says I, promptly. "She was born plain Miss Petersen, and it must have been when she was little and cute that they hung the Inez on her. She's Swede on both

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sides and she's a lovely girl. You can tell that by the placid way she handles her gum. We're from Duluth, Minnesota, as Inez would pronounce it—Meen-ah-soda—chanted through the nose as if it were a solo."

Miss Wellby didn't seem either thrilled or convinced. "Duluth," she repeats. "Quite an interesting city, I've heard."

"You can play that strong," says I. "It's five miles long, a mile wide, and a mile high, and every year they ship enough iron ore out of there to—"

"May I ask," breaks in Miss Wellby, "why you left?"

"Absolutely," says I. "To help Inez find her Uncle Nels. That may sound a little odd, too. She looks big enough and husky enough to go out and find three uncles all by herself. But I've been brought up to believe that this was a big, wicked town, and I couldn't let Inez risk herself alone here. You see, Inez did something awfully nice for me once. As a matter of fact, she saved my life."

"Really!" says Miss Wellby, giving her a curious glance.

"No, she didn't pull me out of Lake Superior, or push away a freight train that was about to run me down," says I. "She lifted me out of Tamarack Junction when I thought I'd taken

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root there. Of course you don't know Tamarack. You're lucky. It's three miles from Dodge's Clearing, where I lived from the time I was two until I was nineteen going on twenty. How paw found it, starting from Connecticut, I never could guess. Maybe he was just trying to lose himself in the pine flats. But when he got to this ten acres of burned-over sand, with the little clump of black spruce in the middle, he seemed to be satisfied. Anyway, that's where he settled down and proceeded to grow old.

"He built us a perfectly good home; that is, if you don't care what you say. There were two rooms and a loft—logs laid up with notch ends and the cracks chinked with mud. Also a frame cook shed in the back. Paw was always promising to build another room, but he never got around to it. Poor old paw! He meant well. And then, he was kept rather busy supplying me with new stepmothers. It was the best thing he did, finding some one to marry him. I don't know whether he was out for the long-distance record or not, but it looked that way. His score stood at five. Not that he was finicky about the ones he picked. We won't go into all the harrowing details, but they kept getting worse and worse. As for the last Mrs. Ephraim Dodge—Well, I don't blame paw for getting discouraged. He just quit. Asthma complicated with matrimony.

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“Quite a lot of us were left—four different lots. Perhaps I didn’t appreciate them as I should, but I’m free to say that we were too mixed. That sort of family life I didn’t care for at all. Yet I went on with it; washing, and cooking, and chopping wood, herding assorted flocks of youngsters, without ever dreaming there was a way out. Not until that day when I went down to the Junction to sell six quarts of raspberries, and found Inez sitting on a baggage truck waiting for the northbound train. I’d never seen her before, but that didn’t prevent me talking to her. About then I coul’d have chatted with a one-eyed mule and enjoyed it. And when I discovered that she was leaving home because she, too, had a stepmother that she wasn’t altogether crazy about, and an old man who used a rake handle on her now and then—well, I warmed to her, as the poets say. I wanted to know all about her plans. And Inez told, using her code. ‘Home I no like,’ says she, ‘so I go up on the Range, by Coleraine. I gotta job in mine boarding house.’ Then, after a little, she asks: ‘You come, too, eh? Plenty jobs.’ ‘Me!’ says I. ‘Would you say I was dressed for traveling, Inez?’ and I turned around so she could get the full effect of my dollar-ninety-eight mail-order morning costume, berry stains, brier tears, and all. Also I added that I hadn’t a cent of real money. With that she un-

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winds a handkerchief, counts out two whole dollars, and says: 'Come.' Just like that.

"What a lot of things you can think of in a few seconds, can't you? I could see myself tramping back to the clearing; the little old shack with the cluttered dooryard; the stumpy fields, mostly grown up to fireweed; the burned woods beyond, naked and dreary. I could see Maw Dodge, slumped down in the doorway, her greasy hair falling over her bleary eyes. I could hear her snarl at me. I could see the old cook-stove, the woodpile where I would have to— Well, I took the two dollars and kissed Inez smack on the lips. Before dark we were up in Coleraine, passing beef stew and hot corn bread and apple pie to checking clerks and steam-shovel bosses and third assistant engineers. Happy! Say, a kitten chasing its tail couldn't have felt lighter in the head. I knew that I'd crossed Dodge's Clearing off the map for good and all."

"I see," says Miss Wellby. "You were grateful to Miss Petersen."

"From my back hair to my big toes," says I. "Maybe the streak was in me all the time, but nobody had ever tapped it before. 'Tell me, Inez,' says I, 'what is it you want most?' Didn't take her by surprise. Nothing does. 'I like go by picture show to-night,' says she. 'You shall,' says I, 'if I have to wash every dish in the house.'"

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Not that I count such little things as that. I'm only trying to show you how I started on this career of sunshine dispenser, guide, and guardian angel. For that's what it amounts to. Ever since then I've been exploring Inez to find out what she wants, and getting it for her. And it isn't at all easy—the finding out. For, as you see, Inez isn't much of a converser. She uses words as though she had to pay an income tax on every one, and there are times when she'd make the Sphinx seem like a chatterbox. Then, again, she'll spill half a dozen remarks, all in one evening. Yes, Inez, I'm talking about you again. I'm about through, though. You see, Miss Wellby, we'd been in Coleraine nearly six months when Inez heard that in Duluth there were movies every night, and in the course of a few days she let it out that she wanted to go there. 'You shall,' says I. My theory was that if you were willing to wait on table you could go anywhere. You can, too. I believe we could tour the world.

"But with Superior Street lined with movie houses, and a big armory where the band played for public dancing, Inez was just as satisfied as if I'd opened the pearly gates for her. That is, she was until she got a letter from home about this Uncle Nels. 'They think I ought to find him,' says she. 'Why?' says I. 'Is he lost?'

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It wasn't that exactly. He was missing, though, and had been for several years. When last heard from he'd been in Duluth. Well, we looked up the address, but he wasn't there. A man said he had gone to New York. At which I told Inez she might as well cross him off the slate. But she shook her head. She had to find Uncle Nels. 'Why all this rush of affection so late?' I asks. 'Is he such a star, uncle?' 'He's rich, Uncle Nels,' says Inez. 'Gosh!' says I. 'That's different. A rich uncle deserves to be kept track of.' So we saved and saved until we had enough to come. And here we are, Miss Wellby."

I suppose she should have shuddered and led us sadly but firmly out to where the brownstone steps started for the sidewalk. But she didn't. Maybe it was the smile I threw in at the finish. Oh, my, yes! That's the easiest thing I do, that smile. Not one of these heart thrillers you get from the screen favorites. Nothing like that. Nobody's going to leave home on account of it. And perhaps it's more of a grin, at that. Doesn't mean much, either. It's just my way of signaling to the human race: "Ah, quit kidding! You're not half as bad as you look, and I'm not, either. So there!" Anyway, Miss Wellby smiled back and led us up to this fourth floor room, with two single iron cots and a window overlooking a double row of back yards.

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"You will be here for only a short time, I presume?" says she.

"Only until we can look up Uncle Nels," says I. "Then I suppose he'll send the limousine for us."

So we paid a week in advance and began unpacking the suitcases.

"Six, eight, ten hooks," says I, counting 'em, "and three hangers! I'll tell you, Inez, while I'm deciding who gets the odd hanger you slip out in the hall and bring in that phone directory. That 'll be the quickest way to locate Uncle Nels. Ought to be Nelson Petersen, I suppose?"

"Petersen?" echoes Inez, and when I looked up she was blinking more stupid than usual.

"Indicating what?" says I. "Heard the name before, haven't you? And if it was your father's, then his brother would be—"

But Inez is moving her head from side to side. "Uncle Nels," says she, "is brother to ma."

"Oh!" says I. "And that would make him—Nels what?"

"I—I dunno," says Inez.

"Wha-a-at!" I gasps. "Of course you know. What was your mother's name before she got to be Mrs. Petersen?"

"Olsen," says Inez. "But—but Uncle Nels, when he go away and get rich he—he change his name. I—I forget."

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"Hallup!" says I. "That's real interesting, that is. Here we are, come all the way to New York to hunt a stray uncle who's flagging under a name you don't happen to remember. But I expect you have some idea what he looks like?"

"No," says Inez. "I don't see him since I was little."

"Well!" says I, settling back on the cot bed and gazing at her, stunned. "I must say that makes it complicated."

"Yes-s-s?" says Inez, in that helpful way of hers.

For a party of the second part, that can be indicated by zero minus y, I take pleasure in presenting Miss Inez Petersen, when she drops into a mood like that. For the next forty minutes or so I jabs questions at her that would have qualified me for a third-degree expert. And at the finish we were about where we started, only I was hoarse and Inez had chewed the flavor all out of her gum. What she didn't know about this missing uncle of hers was amazing. And it wasn't worrying her a bit.

Then, when I was about to give up, I stubbed my toe on what looked like a clue.

"Inez," says I, turning her round so I could look square into the peaceful gray eyes, "can it be true that all you've been feeding me about Uncle Nels was just bunk?"

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"No," says she. "I gotta Uncle Nels. I wanna find him."

"That's on record, and I expect I'll have to believe part of it," says I. "But, honest, now, with nothing but a dim memory to go by, how did you think it was to be done?"

Inez simply rolls her eyes up and inspects a leak stain in the ceiling. It's just the same as cutting the wires or shutting a door in your face. But I wouldn't have it that way.

"Come back, Inez," says I. "And tell me, wasn't the big idea of wishing us into this fool excursion just getting to New York?"

That seems to strike the key. "Long time I wanna go by New York," she admits.

"But why?" I insists. "In the name of all that's simple, why?"

At that Inez ducks her chin, as kittenish as a cow playing tag with a billy goat. She almost works up a blush, too.

"Aw, I dunno," says she. "But so much happens by New York—fine fellers in full-dress suits, swell ladies with long pearl chains, burglars breakin' in, policemen smashin' doors, automobiles runnin' round, and—and millionaires get in love with poor working girls. Things like that all the time in New York. By Duluth, no."

For speed and duration Inez had broken her speech record. Also, in one grand mental effort

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she had put into words all her secret and unguessed yearnings. It was like flashing a searchlight into a dark room that you thought was empty, and discovering it to be full of junk theatrical scenery.

But I could account for Inez now. She had developed a movie mind. Somewhere underneath that double hank of wheat-colored hair wound like a wreath around her head, and back of those Holstein eyes, was a space that had become crowded with the things she had seen on the screen.

No use telling her it wasn't all true. What she had seen pictured out she had taken in as trustful as if angels had spoken from the sky. More than that, from the things I had done for her in the past two years, she was sure I could lead her straight to where all her rosy dreams would come true. Hadn't I taken her from the mine boarding house in Coleraine to Druot's in Duluth, and from there to New York? Wouldn't I manage all the rest? So she sits placid and yanks her gum.

And here I am, stranded in a fourth-floor back on West Fifty-seventh Street, with a one-hundred-and-eighty-pound Swede girl who thought all you had to do to flop into gay adventure and ruddy romance was to find the way to Fifth Avenue!

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"Inez," says I, "I don't know whether to list you as a merry jest or a grim tragedy. Anyway, you're a world beater. I'm not forgetting, though, that if it hadn't been for you I would be still stuck in Dodge's Clearing as fast as any spruce stump. I'm not the forgetting kind. That is why I have made it *my* life job to give you what you want. Anyway, I shall do my best.

"If I may say so, though, it strikes me that your notions of coming on and breaking into the giddy whirl of the metropolis are a bit high colored and a little impetuous. I'm not sure. I've been wrong about you once or twice before. There's no telling. It may be that somewhere in all this messy, noisy burg there awaits a handsome young plute who is all gussied up for passionate wooing beside a marble fountain—waiting for you. And his dark, villainous rival may be lurking behind the potted palms, ready to put a crimp in the course of true love. I can't say.

"But if they were holding the curtain on any such act just because you hadn't arrived, they don't need to wait any longer. It's only a case now of somebody's handing them the cue that you're here. I've brought you on, and we are listening for the cue. As for my part of it, I feel just as much at home as if I'd been appointed guardian to a trick elephant with the sleep-

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walking habit. All the same, I'm going to stand by you, and if anything like you've got on your mind is going to be pulled off, I'll be on hand. Only, Inez, it may take a little time."

And Inez, sitting on the edge of a sagging cot bed, with a pleased, simple expression fluttering across her big pink-and-white face, nods solemn and satisfied.

"Oh, yes-s-s-s!" says she.

She had been in New York nearly two hours and no tall, dark hero in a shiny limousine had claimed her as yet. But she's a patient soul, Inez. And then, she has her gum.

Chapter II

Listing Inez As a Joke

IT'S a contract, I'll tell the judge. What I mean, if you don't get me, is this job I've tackled of towing an overweight Swede girl around New York and giving her what she wants when she wants it. But I've made a swell start, I'll hand myself that much.

"Come, Inez," says I, bright and early the first morning after we landed, "while we're waiting for that rich Uncle Nels of yours to have it revealed to him in a dream that his favorite niece is waiting to be discovered, we had better horn in on some line of industry."

Inez peels the paper off two slabs of gum, tucks 'em in between a dental display that would give joy to a tooth-powder firm, gets the jaw action going rhythmical, and then pauses long enough to ask, "You no think we find Uncle Nels quick?"

"No, Inez," says I. "Not with any great suddenness. Considering the fact that he's traveling incog, as it were, and that you wouldn't know him if you met him face to face, the chances are

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dead against any prompt reunion of the Petersen family."

Inez blinks vivacious, like an eclipse passing over the moon, and then offers this, "Uncle Nels he—he had whiskers."

"That's good as far as it goes," says I. "But I have a hunch, Inez, that if you started in to take a whisker census of this town you'd get some discouraged before you finished. Besides, how do you know that the set Uncle Nels wore when you were a cute little girl were the permanent kind? Maybe he had 'em amputated when he changed his name. Is that all you can remember about him?"

Inez admits that's the whole story.

"Then, while I'm thinking up a way of paging an anonymous uncle," says I, "I'm afraid we must connect with regular pay envelopes somewhere, for the gold reserve in the Lisle Thread National is running low, and Mrs. Wellby isn't going to let us have her fourth-floor back just for the sake of being entertained by your brilliant repartee."

"We getta job? All right," says Inez, chanting it cheerful.

"I hope so," says I. "Let's take a look."

So we wanders out to where Broadway gets itself lost in Columbus Circle and drifts along where the traffic would let us. Our first stop is

LISTING INEZ AS A JOKE

in front of one of these lunch joints where they had a pancake artist browning the wheats within eighteen inches of our noses and whole rows of tables where late breakfasts were being served.

"How about this?" says I. "We know how to deal 'em off the arm and tell the urn man whether to draw 'em black or half-and-half. Shall we brace the boss for a chance on the day shift?"

She's just as impetuous, Inez, as a way freight on an upgrade, with sleet on the rails. After about the tenth yank on the gum her upper lip starts lifting a little, and by watching her eyes I can see that she's sizing up one of the waitresses. You couldn't blame her. All that cerise hair would have been startling enough if it had been done plain, but twisted and ratted the way it was, it sure was an eyeful. And the face under it was a hard face.

"I not like that one," says Inez. "She—she's stuck up."

"Something like that, anyway," says I. "No, I don't think she'd be a matey person to work with. Besides, this looks to me like a bunch of nontippers. Let's move."

We must be an impressive pair, or words to that effect. Anyway, a lot of folks who seemed in a hurry to get somewhere took time enough off to turn for a second look. Maybe it was that

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bargain-sale blouse which Inez was sporting in honor of the occasion. Kind of a vivid taste Miss Petersen has, when it comes to dress goods, and while I do my best to keep her color scheme toned down, there's no holding her if a shirtwaist strikes her fancy. This one was a Harry Lauder plaid, mostly greens and reds, and it should have been presented to a Siwash squaw to wear at the annual spring potlach or some such festive occasion. At least, it shouldn't have been worn with an Alice-blue skirt by an ash blonde with a thirty-eight bust measure. Not on upper Broadway. I could tell that just by the way some of those young ladies held their mouths when they passed us.

Not that I'm any mirror of fashion myself. But generally I stick to a rusty-brown homespun effect that doesn't point the finger of scorn at my cinnamon hair and face freckles, and while I may not be any October symphony, I kid myself that most people will forgive me for being homely if I'm modest about it. So now you ought to have the picture.

"I suppose you haven't any definite ideas, Inez," says I, "as to what kind of a position you'd care to accept?"

"Me?" says Inez. "No."

"That's helpful," says I.

But it isn't two minutes later before she has

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stopped with her mouth open. "Look," says she. "Pretty! Yes?"

I steered her over to the edge of the sidewalk so I could get a good view of what had worked her up that way. 'And what do you guess? It's a white tiled hole-in-the-wall where they sell this orangeade drink. You know. On the white counter is a big gold-fish globe full of the stuff, with sliced fruit floating tempting and a couple of dozen real oranges piled convincingly around. The pimple-faced young gent in charge has just struggled into a dirty white duck coat and is inspecting himself approving in the mirror that forms the back of the establishment.

"Very neat and tasty," says I. "But he doesn't seem rushed with trade, and I see no 'Help Wanted' sign out."

So we walks on a few blocks. But when Inez gets a notion running on that single-track mind of hers, nothing but a burning bridge ahead will get her to switch.

"It would be swell," says she, "in that white place."

And I had to explain all over again why I thought the youth with the pimple face didn't yearn for our help. What you really need, though, to register a thought with Inez, is to lock her up in a room with a nonstop record that will repeat without going hoarse.

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"We've got white clothes, too," insists Inez.

"We have," says I. "Come along back."

And we found the orangeade place livelier than when we had first seen it. A short, stubby man, with crinkly black hair, had somehow got himself in behind the counter, too, and he was shaking his fist menacing at the young gent in the near-white coat. He was telling him things.

"Loafer!" says he. "Twice you are late this week. I catch you again this morning. Yes! And when you come what you do, hey? Nothing but look at your ugly mug in the glass. For two cents I give you the chuck out."

"Here's the two," says I, stepping in and shoving a couple of pennies across the counter.

"Hey!" says he, staring at me.

"It's your proposition," says I, "but I'm willing to finance it. I think you're perfectly right, too."

"Say," growls the youth, "who told you to crash in on this?"

"Nobody, dearie," says I. "Don't you know a surprise party when you see one?"

"Some fresh Jane, I'll say," he snarls. "Eh, Mr. Popogoulis?"

"What you want, you?" demands the other.

"Now we're getting down to brass tacks, mister," says I. "My great little idea was to boost along the vacancy so we could fill it for you. Inez

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and me, I mean. This is Inez, browsing on her gum. She may not look so ambitious, but she's confided in me that a career as dispenser of orangeade would suit her exactly. She'd be a wonder at it. Only you'd have to take the pair of us. Well? Is it a trade?"

At which Pimple Face snickers. "Look at the freaks that wants to do me out of my job, Popogoulis," says he. "Oh, say!"

And Popogoulis looks. "Would I want a voddie-ville sketch team in here?" he asks. "Say, who are you, anyway?"

"Sorry I haven't my card case along," says I, "but I'm Trilby May Dodge, just in from Duluth, Minnesota. And my blond friend is Miss Inez Petersen, who came with me. We always travel double, too. But listen, Mr. Popperwhosit, we're not half so comical as we may look. These are our Superior Street costumes that we haven't had time to change. Give us a chance to get into some snowy white uniforms and we'll be different parties. We're expert soft-drink jugglers, too. Nearly a year in Druot's, which is the classiest ice-cream parlor between Chicago and the North Pole. No mistakes in orders, no funny work with the cash register. Oh, we're good, mister."

"Huh!" says he. "You say it easy."

Which is where Pimple Face tries to crowd his

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luck. Thought he had the boss on a leash, I expect. "Go to it, if you think this pair of female hicks could do better than me and Mike," says he. "Help yourself."

"So-o-o?" says Popogoulis looking him over cool. "Thanks for nothing." Then he turns to me. "How much you want?" he asks.

"We'll talk about that when you've checked up sales after the first week," says I.

That brings a satisfied grunt out of him.

"When you could go on the job?" he demands.

"Give us twenty minutes for a quick shift and we'll be here," says I.

Popogoulis may be no mental speed artist as a rule, but this seems to be his day for prompt action. "All right," says he, and whirls on the youth. "Take it off," he tells him.

"Eh?" says the other.

"You're fired," says Popogoulis. "Get out."

He got. And naturally he doesn't ask me to kiss him good-by. "You fish-eyed moll," says he. "I'll queer you for this."

"Oh, chirk up, buddy," says I. "Any blood purifier firm would be glad to use that face of yours as a before-taking ad. Try 'em out."

So that's how we happened to land in No. 47 of the orangeade chain, and got started as a pair of Hebes of the Golden Bowl. Seemed a little odd at first, with so many folks staring in at us

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at such close range. And for the first day or so, with all this white tiling around, I couldn't get over the idea that we had been dropped into a bathroom with the front out. But it's odd how soon you can get used to anything, isn't it? By the middle of the week I felt as though I'd always been there, began to get a line on most of the regular customers, and could ladle out the thirst quenchers as fast as they shoved in their nickels.

As for Inez, she was as contented as a lady Holstein resting in the shade at noontime. Wasn't there a movie show three doors above, and another two blocks down the street? And couldn't she look out to the Circle and see a constant parade of taxicabs and limousines, not to mention Fifth Avenue buses and sightseeing chariots? And who knows what realms of romance she could read in every one of them?

During the dull spells I would watch Inez curious, as she stood there with her elbows on the counter, gazing out that way and yanking her gum slow and placid. She isn't so hard to look at, you know, especially in that near-nurse's costume with the white straps over her shoulders, and the little white cap pinned on top of all that pile of braided wheat-colored hair, and her white throat showing up strong and round, like a marble pillar in front of a bank. Of course, there's a good deal of her. It's fairly well

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distributed, though. And that strawb'ry-and-vanilla-mixed complexion of hers helps some.

"I must say, Inez," I tells her, "you do fit in well with the background. Like you belonged. A regular queen of the booth, you are."

"Yes-s-s?" says she, smiling pleased. "You—you look nice, too."

"Me!" says I. "Oh, sure! I'm a regular home wrecker, Inez. That is, I might be if it wasn't for my plain features and my up-and-down figure, and the green gooseberry eyes. Outside of those few items I'm a perfect vamp. I'm glad you noticed it. Nobody else has up to date. Just for that I'll spell you while you slip out for an early lunch."

Then I began to wonder if this career as a modern Ruth at the well of orangeade was going to satisfy her yearning for adventure, such as she'd sketched out to me when I discovered that she had a moving-picture mind. Once I put it up to her.

"How about it, Inez?" says I. "Are you finding New York as full of thrills as you thought it would be?"

"Fine place, New York," says Inez.

"But nothing real exciting has happened to you yet," I suggests.

"Oh, it comes—bym-by," says Inez.

So why disturb a childlike trust like that? I

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ask you. I might have pointed out that serving nut sundaes and hot chocolate on Superior Street was almost as hectic a pastime as dealing out cold drinks on Broadway, and that you could go on doing either for a long time without getting mixed up in what a movie director would call a big punch scene. But I didn't. I just smiled to think how simple she was in the head.

Never again, though. Listing Inez as a joke is a poor hunch. For look! Well, it wasn't over two days later that we took a little after-supper stroll, just to get the air and make us tired enough to forget the lumps in the mattress when we finally took to the cots. Of course we'd had the usual debate over it first.

"By Eight' Avenue," suggests Inez, "is a Mr. Bill Hart show."

"Please, Inez!" says I. "Not to-night. If you knew how little I cared for that man. Gosh! Say, I'll bet I've seen Bill Hart ride a million miles and roll four million cigarettes on the gallop. Let's give him a week's rest."

Inez pouts disappointed, but two minutes later she has another brilliant thought. "Up by Broadway," says she, "Mister Doug-las-s-s Fairbanks is in six-reeler."

"Yes," says I, "he usually is. And for an hour and a half he'll spring that grin of his, and climb up the front of fake palaces, and push the

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villain off of a roof, and work up the final fade-out, where he goes to a tight clinch with the Princess of Angostura. Then there'll be a news reel showing how they laid the cornerstone of the new Masonic temple at Ellenville, New York, and a glimpse of President Harding taking the oath of office, and a few hundred feet of film depicting the cute antics of a horse-fly feeding her young. Have a heart, Inez. Besides, you know we agreed that every other night was about all our finances would stand."

Inez can't deny it, but she sulks for the next ten minutes until she decides to console herself by combining two slabs of wintergreen flavor with one of pepsin; after which she pins on her hat and allows me to lead her east across Broadway and away from the lure of the silver screen. And it wasn't long before I had her interested in our favorite game of picking out a trousseau from the shop windows. We're reckless shoppers when we let ourselves go that way. Especially Inez. Her taste seems to run to cloth-of-gold evening gowns and ermine capes with lots of real tails on them. Also three-inch dinner rings and long pearl ropes. I've often wondered how she would really look in such an outfit if by any miracle she could ever get one on. I suspect she'd have the Queen of Sheba looking like a country dressmaker tackling the Monday wash.

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"And all day," Inez announces, "I ride up and down in limousine."

"Oh, quite so," says I. "That's part of the picture."

"Then for dinner," adds Inez, "big steak with plenty fried onions. Lotta cream puffs, too."

"Now you have done it," says I. "You've made me so hungry that nothing but a sweitzer sandwich and half of a fat dill pickle will bring peace to my tortured soul. And I think there's a delicatessen store back on Sixth Avenue in the block below this. Come."

But Inez wasn't to be hurried away from a window where a beaded evening gown hung twinkly and shimmery against a background of black velvet.

"Well, then," says I, "you drift along as far as the next corner, while I dash around and lay in supplies before they close up. I'll be back here inside of five minutes. You'll be all right, won't you?"

"Me?" says Inez. "Sure!"

Those stores are seldom just where you think they are, though. This one had dodged two blocks out of the way. And the old frau with the dried-apple face and the sage-green wig certainly took her time about making up those cheese sandwiches. Forgot to put on the mustard until after she had 'em all wrapped up, at that.

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So it must have been nearly fifteen minutes before I came scurrying up to the window where the beaded gown was still hanging. But no Inez was gawping at it. She wasn't anywhere in sight, either up or down the avenue, and Inez is visible at quite a distance, you know, even in a crowd. By the time I had walked two blocks up and one down without finding her, I suppose I was a little panicky. Anyway, what I said to that boneheaded night watchman who was guarding a pile of bricks and sand wasn't particularly sane.

"You haven't seen my friend Inez, have you?" I asked.

"Which?" says he, through a corncob pipe.

"Big Swede girl with yellow hair?" I adds.

"Oh, that one!" says he. "She ducked across the street, over there. Just missed gettin' bumped by a taxi, too. Red feathers on her hat."

"That's Inez," says I, and darts in the direction he was pointing his thumb.

I could see a house front that was well lighted and a sidewalk canopy set up. Somebody having a coming-out party, or announcing an engagement. And Inez must have seen what she would call "swell people" arriving or going away. That would be enough for her. I should have to talk to Inez again about the danger of trying to rush

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across Fifth Avenue hen fashion, without waiting for the traffic lulls. About wandering alone, too, at this hour of the night.

I had gone nearly to the middle of this side street and was almost opposite the canopied entrance, looking into every doorway in the hope of finding Inez staring out from behind a shadow, when I noticed this little group of folks that seemed to be milling around so odd and senseless. I caught a glimpse of a podgy little man in evening clothes who was hopping about on his toes as if he was tryin' to jump into his silk hat, which he had dropped on the sidewalk. Then there was a large, fat woman, with an opera cape hanging from one shoulder and her arms waving wildly as she clawed at a slim young chap who was tugging to get away. Also, there was a fellow in a chauffeur's uniform, who edged in and then dodged back out of reach. And they were all so busy and silent about it. Not a word spoken. Only now and then a heavy puff, evidently from the fat woman, or a grunt from one of the men. I couldn't make out what it was all about.

Then the slim chap gave a final whirl, hit the fat woman in the chest with his elbow, kicked vicious at the chauffeur, and broke loose completely. He was legging it toward the East River when the screams started. The fat woman had found her voice.

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"Police! Police!" she squealed. "He—he's got my jewel bag!"

Even that didn't seem to disturb anyone. As a matter of fact, there was nobody in sight to be disturbed. I heard a front window shoved up.

"Stop him! Stop the thief!" shouted the fat woman. "Police!"

But no police came on the run, or even sauntered up. Any more than they would if you'd staged such an affair on Main Street in Tamarack Junction when Constable Sol Heffner was playing pinochle in the back of Feltner's general store. And meanwhile the slim chap was making a speedy getaway.

I suppose I was watching him run, kind of excited and nervous, but not thinking of doing anything in particular, and perhaps rather hoping that he wouldn't trip or stub his toe, when I saw a bulky female figure step out directly in his path, open her arms, and fold him in. It was almost as though he had jumped through a trap door. Anyway, both of them went down, and I could dimly see them rolling about the sidewalk.

"He's caught! He's caught!" shrieks the fat woman, hysterical. "See, Junius? Now, for Heaven's sake, do something."

The podgy little man didn't seem so anxious. However, he picked up his silk hat, gave it a hasty brush on his sleeve, and started, with the

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fat woman hanging to his arm, her opera cape dragging behind. The chauffeur went along, too. I hadn't been asked, but I fell in behind. I wasn't sure, but there seemed to be something familiar about that husky figure which had folded in the runaway so thoroughly. Of course, it might not be Inez—

But it was. When the four of us reached the spot and surrounded her, she had squirmed on top and was sitting jauntily on this perfect stranger, who was considerable flattened amidships and was groaning feebly: "Take her off! Oh, take her off!"

As for Inez, her best hat was a total wreck, one sleeve of her shirtwaist was ripped at the shoulder, and she was breathing rather heavy.

"Oh, Inez!" says I. "Are you hurt?"

"No," says Inez. "But ay—ay swallow my gum."

"You brave, noble girl!" breaks in the fat lady. "You have saved my jewels. See, Juinus, he still has the bag in his hand. Take it away from him."

"Yes, my dear," says Junius. "But would it not be better to get an officer first? Otto, see if you cannot find a policeman."

"And leave us at the mercy of this robber?" protests the fat lady. "Why, he might get away."

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"Not him!" says Inez, jouncing up and down a little. "Aye got him, all right."

"O-o-o-o!" gurgles the jewel snatcher.

"Don't worry, lady," says I. "He couldn't be safer if he was spiked to the sidewalk. Inez will hold him."

"Then you know this heroic young person?" says she. "Who is she?"

"Miss Inez Petersen," says I. "She's a friend of mine, and there's one hundred and eighty pounds of her."

"I'll take the car and bring back a cop," volunteers Otto.

It took him nearly ten minutes, at that, but finally he rolled up with one and we helped Inez to her feet while the officer yanked up the breathless thief.

"Huh!" says the policeman. "Slim Joe, eh? Only two months out of Sing Sing and at it again, are you? Well, it's headquarters for yours, Joe."

"Any—anywheres you say," pants Joe. "Only don't let that baby elephant sit on me again."

At that I tried to lead Inez away, but the policeman wouldn't let me. He said she had to go along with the others to tell the Chief all about it.

"Never mind, young lady," says Junius. "We will see that she gets home all right."

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And the next thing I knew they'd all piled into the limousine and were gone. There didn't seem to be room for me, so I walked back to West Fifty-seventh Street and waited. It was a long wait, too. I finished my half of the sandwiches and pickle and had all I could do to keep my teeth out of the rest, for somehow this adventure stuff had worked up an appetite. It got to be twelve o'clock, then half past, and no Inez. I was just beginning to wonder if she had been locked up, too, when I heard her gentle tread on the stairs.

"Well!" says I, throwing open the door.

And if it hadn't been for the red feather on the wrecked lid I'd hardly have known her at that, for she's wearing a gorgeous silk opera cape.

"For the love of Pete!" says I. "Where did you collect that?"

"Mis' Junius Stokes she make me present," announces Inez. "Swell, eh?"

"It's all of that," says I. "But where were you so long?"

"Oh, we go to big place, lotta policemen," says Inez. "Funny talk. They tell me I must go on force to catch thieves."

"There's more truth than comedy about that," says I. "I expect you're hungry, after all that. I saved a sandwich for you."

"Huh!" says Inez. "Sandwich! No. I been

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to fine big hotel. Lobster, ice cream, 'n' everything. Mister Stokes buy me what I want. Mis' Stokes, she gets me new hat to-morrow, too. And I ride all the way in limousine!"

"Gosh!" says I. "Right in with the automobility! I take it all back, Inez, you're a winner. Made a hit right off the bat, didn't you?"

"Nice man, that Joe," says Inez.

"You mean Junius, I suppose," says I. "Mr. Stokes—the podgy one?"

Inez shakes her head. "He's all right, too," says she, "but Joe, the slim one—" and then she ducks her chin coy.

"Hal-lup!" I gasps. "If she hasn't fallen for the purse snatcher! Say, Inez, haven't you any discretion?"

"He—he got nice eyes," insists Inez.

"Good night!" says I, meaning every word of it. For 1 A.M. is no time to start in prying a fool idea out of such a slow-working mind as that. Besides, with this hero of hers locked up so tight, why worry?

But I can see from here that Inez and I have no dull gray future ahead of us. Not when she can pick up adventure and romance while I'm around the corner after cheese sandwiches.

Chapter III

Inez Gets Her Wish

SAY, the more I trail around with Inez the less I get acquainted with her. That may seem odd, too. But it's a fact. First off I thought I was the master mind in this sketch team that's come down from Duluth to explore New York for Uncle Nels and other curiosities. I had a hunch that it was Trilby May Dodge who was furnishing the brains and Inez the weight. Every now and then, though, I get a rude jolt which makes me suspect that Inez, with that single-track, movieized mind of hers, isn't to be listed as just so much excess baggage.

Take this matter of her missing Uncle Nels, for instance. Now, of course, I've crossed him off the slate long ago. From the very start, after she'd admitted that he was flagging under another name and that she couldn't remember what he looked like exactly, except that he had whiskers once, why, naturally I'd say she had as much chance of finding him, if he still existed, as she would of retrieving a safety pin dropped from a North River ferryboat.

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Yet when I suggest that this orangeade booth job of ours is about as uncertain as that of any hold-over postmaster in a hungry Republican district, and that we ought to be saving up against the day when Mr. Popogoulis might drift in with a grouch and give us both the gate Inez merely hunches her broad shoulders and springs that stupid pastoral stare of hers.

For one item, Inez has graduated from the Eighth Avenue arcades, where you can see six-reel thrillers for thirty cents, including war tax, and she has developed a taste for center-aisle seats in the big Broadway movie houses, where a perfectly elegant gent in full evening dress leads the big orchestra and they put on the tenor and soprano selections with special scenery. She's strong for the organ numbers, too.

"Swell music," says Inez. "Makes me feel good here." And she pats her skirt band to indicate the exact spot.

"Now I know what they mean by drinking it in," says I. "You swallow it whole, don't you, Inez? But the fact remains that for these frills they nick us just twice as much and you want to go twice as often. It may be true that heaven protects the working girl, but that's as far as it goes. How she manages what comes in the pay envelope is up to her."

Whether any of that sank in or not I can't say,

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for Inez chews placid on her gum awhile, and then remarks, cheerful, "Well, I got rich uncle, anyhow."

"So I've heard you state," says I. "He's about as much use to us just at present, though, as the fame and fortune which I'm dead sure is coming to me. We've still got both to find before we cash in on 'em."

"But I like thinkin' 'bout Uncle Nels," insists Inez.

"Help yourself, then," says I, "only ease off on the sundry-expense account."

Not that we hadn't worked up a good business at the drink booth. I knew we had, for I'd discovered a daily sales slip tucked back of the cash register, and I could figure where our average was running nearly 40 per cent higher than anything Pimple Face and his side kick had been able to show. But does Boss Popogoulis loosen up in proportion? He does not. When I give him a gentle hint that there ought to be a little commission coming our way he simply hunches his neck down into his collar, and those black eyes of his take on a hard glitter.

"I can get plenty girls in here for less," says he.

"Quite so," says I. "But not a pair of cross-mated blondes like us, who'll ring up so many nickels in a day. Why, say, mister, let me tell you something. There are more than two dozen

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young hicks and as many more old sports who've got the Inez habit already."

"Hey?" says he. "What is that?"

"Oh, the habit of drifting around here at least twice a day," says I. "Think they've acquired a chronic thirst for orangeade? Well, hardly! Most of 'em come to tell Inez what a lovely girl she is, and if she happens to let up on the pepsin long enough to give 'em one of her broad-gauge smiles and show her cheek dimples, they're as good as booked for regular customers. When she misses I'm liable to edge in with a few frivolous remarks that makes each one think he's a home wrecker. That's the secret of our success, you know. Team work. They look at Inez and listen to me, and that's why the nickels roll in. Come, now, Popogoulis; slip in a couple more denarii next Saturday."

He growls that he'll think it over, which isn't a bit promising.

Then all of a sudden Miss Wellby insists on shifting us to a better room on the second floor, at three bucks more per week. "You'll be so much more comfortable there," says she, "and it will look better if Miss Petersen finds her Uncle Nels and he comes to call."

"Inez," says I, "have you been telling Miss Wellby about your rich uncle?"

Inez admits that she has.

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"That was reckless," says I. "Now, we've got to live up to him, and I don't quite see how it's to be done."

But you can't worry Inez with little trifles like that. She's not the worrying kind. She simply rolls her big gray eyes around our new quarters approving, and remarks: "Nice room. Lotta hooks in closet. Three windows."

"And the bath only two doors down the hall, don't omit that," says I. "But don't enlarge on this Uncle Nels tale any more than you can help, for I understand the singer person is checking out from the first floor suite next week, and I don't want to be called on to finance that."

"Oh, well!" says Inez, starting to uncoil that double hank of wheat-colored hair.

It was only the next afternoon, too, while old Popogoulis was making his daily prow around the booth, that the Junius Stokeses roll up in their limousine. You remember? They're the ones that Inez got mixed up with the night she caught the purse snatcher on the fly and sat on him until Junius found a cop. And at the time Mrs. Stokes had promised to buy Inez a new hat for the one that was wrecked during the scrimmage. I got the connection the minute I saw 'em drive up. And, boss or no boss, I wasn't going to have Inez miss a chance to collect.

"Run along, Inez," I says to her. "I can

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handle the business until the night shift comes on, and I'm sure Mr. Popogoulis won't mind."

You should have seen him stare as Junius hops out gallant and eases her into the limousine.

"I know!" he whispers, husky. "The rich uncle!"

"What a close guesser you are!" says I. "She must have told you?"

He wags his head wise. "Lucky girl, Miss Petersen," says he.

"Looks that way, don't it?" says I.

"Say," he asks, confidential, "maybe he comes around again, sometimes?"

"Can happen," says I.

"I like to meet him," says Popogoulis.

"Well, that's something else again," says I.

"What's the grand little idea?"

"Business proposition," says Popogoulis.

"Fine corner property I can get on long lease up Broadway. But it's big building. I'd need more money to swing it. Maybe—maybe Miss Petersen's uncle likes to make good investment. If I could have some talk with him—"

"Might be fixed—in time," says I. "I don't know. Meanwhile, how about that little salary boost you've been chewing over?"

"Yes, yes," says he, impatient. "You get it to-morrow. I make it three more."

"Fair enough," says I. "And I'll have speech with Inez about her uncle."

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I hope I didn't let on how thrilled I was about this raise, but honest to goodness, I had all I could do to keep from fox-trotting across West Fifty-seventh Street when I turned over the shop to the night force and started for the boarding house. I expected to find Inez with her nose against the dining room door, waiting for the signal. She generally is, you know.

But not this time. She's up in our room very much deshabelle, as the divorce accounts put it, and she's gazing round-eyed at two evening gowns spread out on the bed. I suppose I did the open-face act myself for a minute or two before I recovered from the jolt.

"For the love of Lucille!" I gasps. "What's all this, Inez?"

"See!" says she. "Dinner dresses. Pretty, yes?"

"Not a doubt," says I, pickin' one up and running my fingers over the beadwork. "But that doesn't tell me whence and whither. Left here by mistake, I suppose?"

"No," says Inez, "I bring 'em."

"Eh?" says I. "You don't mean that—see here, Inez, let's end the suspense. Tell me you didn't yield to temptation and throw a brick through some show window."

"Me?" says Inez, trying to look shocked. "I wouldn't do that, ever. Mis' Stokes she send dresses. We wear 'em to dinner party."

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"Hal-lup!" says I. "Now you're exceeding the speed limit. I'm four blocks behind you and dropping back every second. What dinner party? When?"

"To-night," says Inez, "by Mis' Stokes's house. Swell, eh?"

"Absolutely," says I. "Also a bit unexpected. But what's it all about, if you don't mind my asking?"

And little by little Inez sketches the whole story for me. It had been while she was at the milliner's trying on hats that Mrs. Stokes had suggested her coming home for dinner with them. At least, she thought it was the lady, although maybe it was Junius.

"The milliner lady," says Inez, "she take my hair down and—and twist it up funny. Then she put on hat and Miss Stokes she pat her hands and say, 'Look, Junius, how perfect-ly stunning!' And Mister Junius he say, 'Yes,' and—and then they talk about dinner. They want me to bring Uncle Nels, too."

"Oh-ho!" says I. "You'd been telling the Stokeses about your rich uncle, had you?"

"Sure!" says Inez, ducking her head coy.

"But when you were asked to produce him how did you squirm out of it?" I insists.

"I dunno," says Inez. "I don't say much, except that I like to have you come, too."

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"How clever!" says I. "And then what?"

"Mister Junius say 'all right,'" says she, "and Miss Stokes she take dresses from trunk and—and the limousine comes quarter to seven."

"Could anything be simpler?" says I. "I ask you, now. We have exactly half an hour to find Uncle Nels and fit ourselves into those evening gowns. I'm sorry to say, Inez, it can't be done; particularly the Uncle Nels part."

"I don't say I bring him," says Inez, starting to pout. "And I want to go to dinner party. You oughta see. Swell house. Butler 'n' everything."

"That settles it, Inez," says I. "In all our young lives we've never been buttled over once, have we? And we may never have the chance again. Besides, the worst they can do will be to throw us out. Shall we risk it?"

Inez nods as brisk as she knows how, and in her excitement slips back into her Minnesota dialect. "Aytank aywear the pink one," says she.

"Just a minute," says I, holding it up to get the effect. "The saints defend us! Not the pink one, Inez. It's too scant above the waist. Notice where those shoulder straps start from. Why, you'd look like the weekly beef ration arriving at an army post. And goodness knows there's little enough of this black net affair, but at least there is material that passes for sleeves."

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Slip it on and let's view the result, while I see if my native modesty will survive the shock of this pink scandal."

"O-o-o!" gurgles Inez, when she gets a glimpse of me.

"I know, dearie," says I. "My shoulder blades haven't had such a public airing since I went swimming in the creek back at Dodge's Clearing, but if you can fold over about three inches down the back seam and pin it together neat I guess I'll get by the censor. Mrs. Junius Stokes and I aren't built on exactly the same lines, but it doesn't look so badly, does it?"

"Lovely!" says Inez, gawping at me. "Why, you look like—like—"

"I get you," says I. "Words fail. Just take a glimpse in the mirror yourself, though, Inez. Uh-huh. Black is your color. Shows off your hair and complexion better than anything else. Oh, for an eyebrow pencil! Wait! Here's a burnt match end. There! And if we could only stretch the skirt down about two inches they'd say you'd cabled your measurements over to Chicot. But then, that part of you 'll be under the table most of the time. We'll trust so, anyway. And now, if you'll show me the funny way that milliner twisted your hair."

We made a guess at it, and by the time word comes up that the limousine waits below we

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were ready. That is, I'd stuffed Inez into her borrowed frock and she'd draped mine around me. What the general effect would have been on an outsider I can't say, but as we passed the pier glass in the lower hall and got our first full-length view, we couldn't help pausing and drawing a long breath.

"My!" says Inez. "You— You look elegant!"

"I admit it," says I. "That's the way I feel, anyway. Of course, sea-shell pink doesn't go exactly with carrotty hair and freckles, but it tones in well enough with my gooseberry-green eyes. Personally, I'm not crazy about displaying so much of my backbone, but if I can stand it I guess other folks can. As for you, Inez, all you lack is an ermine-trimmed robe and some pearl ropes to be mistaken for a grand duchess. But gosh! We must get started."

It was just our poor luck that all of Mrs. Wellby's boarders were still in the dining room just then, and that not more than a dozen people, including two janitors, were in sight as we swept majestic down the old brownstone steps. Such as they were, though, we gave 'em a treat. And the Stokes's chauffeur opened the limousine door real respectful.

As a rule Inez takes her thrills with no more outward show than a blink or two, but we hadn't

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driven half a block before she begins squirming around on the cushions.

"Stop it, Inez," says I. "Those patent snappers aren't steel rivets, you know, and you mustn't put too much strain on 'em. What's the matter?"

"Man!" says she, starin' through the back window.

"What man?" I demands.

"He was waiting in doorway as we come out," whispers Inez. "Now—now he's in taxi behind."

"Oh, come!" says I. "Forget that small town stuff. You're not back in Duluth. This is New York. Why, I can count half a dozen taxis behind us, and as soon as we swing into Broadway we'll be in a procession of 'em fourteen miles long. and another thing, Inez: the moment we strike the block the Stokeses live in you've got to park that cud of gum permanent in the roadway."

That calms her for a while, but as we turned into a street in the West Seventies she's staring anxious out of the window again.

"Look!" says she, clutching me nervous by the arm. "Same man!"

"I doubt it," says I. "But even so, I fail to work up any panic over it. All that's worrying me just now is what we're going to tell 'em about Uncle Nels. You'd better leave that part of it to me, Inez. And here we are."

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Two minutes later, and Mrs. Stokes is receiving us with enthusiastic squeals. She's a pudgy, billowy female herself, and you could hardly blame her for being surprised at the way her evening gowns showed up on some one who didn't run so much to curves. True, she was gazing mostly at Inez.

"Superb!" says she. "Why, I had no idea you could— Come, Junius! Come and see her."

At which Junius trots in from the next room and examines Inez approving.

"Stunning!" says he. "Didn't I tell you she would be? And—er—Miss—ah—"

"Dodge," says I. "But don't bother about me. I'm just among those present. Too bad about Uncle Nels, though. Inez couldn't get word to him."

"Eh?" says Junius. "Uncle Nels? Oh yes. But that doesn't matter. Not in the least. Another time, perhaps—if necessary."

He's a nervous, fluttery little man, with restless eyes and hands. And every time he says anything he glances at Mrs. Stokes, as if he was getting her O. K. on it.

"Junius means," puts in Mrs. Stokes, "that we have another guest to-night; quite a distinguished man, I may say—Mr. Morgan Smith, the capitalist."

"Quite wealthy," adds Junius.

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"I hope he's somebody's uncle, too," says I, just by way of saying something.

I was waiting for some side light on why we'd been picked out as dinner guests, but so far nothing had been offered. Perhaps Inez knew more than she'd told, but it wasn't likely. And probably it would come out later on.

The next thing I know, though, Mrs. Stokes and Junius seem to be swapping some confidences in code.

"Shall we?" asks Junius.

"M-m-m-m," says Mrs. Stokes, tapping her pursed lips with a platinum lorgnette and turning to gaze critical at Inez. "I think so."

"Then you do it," urges Junius.

"Very well," says she.

With that she takes Inez by the hand and starts leading her toward the hallway. "Come, my dear," she goes on. "We have just time before Mr. Morgan Smith arrives. I want you to wear something for me."

So I'm left with Junius for a minute or so until the butler tows in the missing guest. And say, a lot of these New York plutes aren't much to look at, are they? This Morgan Smith, for instance. Of course I'd never heard of him before. He may belong to one of the old Wall Street families, for all I know. But I must say that his dinner coat might have fitted snugger around the

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neck, and I didn't know that any but movie stars tucked the ends of their black ties under their turnover collars. He doesn't seem such a chatty party, either. Probably afraid he'd spill something about the stock market that we could cash in on. Junius, though, is there with the polite patter and tells him how he'll soon have the pleasure of meeting Miss Petersen of Duluth.

"An heiress," adds Junius, kind of on the side. "Rich uncle. Interested in—er—the same proposition that you are. In fact, the young lady has consented to wear them to-night. Nothing closed, however, you understand."

"I see," says Mr. Morgan Smith.

All of which meant very little to me. But it got me pricking my ears forward. What was it that Inez was going to wear? Goodness knows I hoped it would be something substantial. She needed it. And just why he should be so much better posted about Uncle Nels than I was I couldn't figure out. Unless Inez had been drawing on an imagination that I didn't know she had.

"Ah!" says Junius. "Here they are."

Say, I took one look, and then I let out a gasp that must have sounded like a bottle of home brew exhausting through the cork. Was this Inez, or the late Cleopatra? Talk about jewels! Why, she was decorated like a Christmas tree.

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They were hung around her neck, they blazed from different parts of the black dress, and topping her honey-colored hair was a regular crown effect with a blue stone half the size of a fried egg and diamonds splashed all around it. If I'd been brought up in a pawn shop I might describe 'em better, but, being no gem expert, I'll have to let it ride at that. Anyway, it was some display.

Mr. Morgan Smith is a cool one, though. He don't seem more than half stunned. "And you say," he asks, "that these are the genuine—"

"Exactly," breaks in Junius. "Sent over by a commission from the Soviet government. But we'll talk about that after dinner. All ready, Barton? Very well, Mr. Smith, will you take in Mrs. Stokes?"

I expect it was a perfectly gorgeous feed, too, but between trying to guess which was the right fork to use and staring at Inez I was too busy to notice what I was eating. You'd have thought Inez would have been dazed, too, by all that magnificence hung on her. But not Miss Petersen. She sits there with her chin well up, blinking bland and peaceful, and only now and then, when she catches me gazing at her, indulging in that simple, childish smile of hers. I remember producing the same effect once by giving her a string of pink beads that I'd bought at the Five and Ten. All the remark she makes is when she

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leans across the table while her plate is being shifted, and asks me how I think she looks.

"Like a spruce after a sleet storm, Inez," says I. "How do you feel?"

"Swell," says Inez, using one of her three adjectives.

Somehow, though, it wasn't a lively dinner party, and while Inez and I didn't miss a single trick, from the caviar doodads to the smelly cheese, neither of us contributes much to the gayety of the occasion. As for me, I couldn't help wondering what it was all about. Mr. Morgan Smith fails to loosen up, too. But the Stokeses did their best. And yet, all the time I had a hunch that something was going to break sudden.

It did. Just as Barton was bringing the tray of little coffee cups into the drawing-room this Smith person strolls casually to the front window, runs up the shade, pulls it down again, and strolls back.

"And you guarantee," says he to Junius, "that these are the Russian crown jewels?"

"S-s-sh!" says Junius, looking about wild.

"Ah, ditch that stuff!" says Smith. "I've got you right this time, Mister Flooey Meyers, alias Little Dutch, alias J. Stokes."

There comes a panicky squeal from Mrs. Stokes and she collapses on a gilt sofa. Junius gets pop-eyed and makes motions with his mouth like a

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fish flopping in the bottom of a boat. But he makes a good stab at recovering.

"I—I don't quite understand," says he. "There must be some mistake."

"Sure there was," says Smith. "Two of 'em. One was when you left Pittsburgh and brought this shop-worn con trick to New York. Had your nerve with you, I'll say. The other was when you looked up Morgan Smith in Bradstreet's and neglected to take a squint at his photograph. Say, I look about as much like him as I do like you. Didn't even know he was in Pinehurst, did you? That's how his secretary, who happens to be my brother-in-law, could let me use his private office the day you made your proposition. Yes, Flooey, I'm from headquarters, and that's where you're— Hey, come back here!"

Junius, who had been backing toward the front hall, had taken a running start. But he didn't get far, for just outside the door he runs into two more plain-clothes men who come dragging him in.

"Shall I put the wristlets on him, Lieutenant?" asks one.

"Don't bother," says the lieutenant. "Most likely he has his bail bond all arranged for and will come quietly. Eh? That's right, Flooey. The Chief will want to see the lady, too."

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"How about the girls?" asks the detective, nodding toward Inez and me.

"No," says the lieutenant. "Just stool pigeons. I know where to find them when they're wanted. But we'll need that glassware as evidence. I'll have to ask you to shed the fake ornaments, sister."

"Me?" says Inez, gawping at him.

"Sorry," says the lieutenant, "but you wouldn't want to wear all that junk in the drink booth, to-morrow, would you? You'd tie up the traffic. Besides, the heiress act is over, Miss Petersen."

"Oh, all right," says Inez, singing it placid through her nose.

And with my help Inez is undecorated.

"Now we can go home, can we?" I asks.

The lieutenant nods.

"If you don't mind," says I, "I'm going to touch this Junius person for taxi fare."

"Go to it," says he.

And while Junius seemed a bit annoyed over it, he did dig up a five and passed it over.

"Thanks," says I. "But say, mister, next time you stage us in a bunco game kindly get a Smith who isn't on the police force. And be sure to look pleasant when you sit for your thumbprints. Come, Inez, I have some advice to slip you about making dinner dates."

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And on the way back to the boarding house I tried to make it quite clear to her that so much prattle about a rich uncle who couldn't be produced was bound to get us in wrong sooner or later. There are times, though, when it's just as useless talking to Inez as it is trying to chat over a dead wire. She just sits there with that simple smirk on her face and says never a word.

"Say," I breaks in, "what's so humorous about getting mixed up with a pair of crooks and just dodging a night in the hoosgow?"

"Hey?" says Inez, rousing from the trance. "Didn't I tell you it comes? In Duluth, no. By New York, yes. Swell peoples—lotta jewelry—and then the police break in. Just like six-reeler. And we—we get in the middle of it. Ah-h-h!"

"We did, Inez, we did," I admits. "And with a mind working along the lines that yours does, Heaven only knows how long we'll stay out of another."

Chapter IV

Trilby May Shoos Off a Jinx

“WELL, Inez,” I asks, curious, as we settles ourselves for an early boarding-house breakfast, “why all the gloom?”

But it’s one thing to put Inez on the stand and something else again to get her to answer questions. She merely unfolds a damp napkin about the size of a cigarette coupon, and shrugs her shoulder.

“I’ll admit,” says I, “that it isn’t wholly cheering to face stewed rhubarb for the fifth consecutive morning. But chirk up. It might have been prunes.”

“I like prunes, too,” says Inez.

“Then for the love of soup,” I goes on, “why start a nice spring day by wearing a face like that?”

She finishes the last spoonful of the fruit substitute and sops a piece of bread in the dish, thoughtful, before she remarks, “I have bad dream last night.”

“Eh?” says I. “Then you must have dreamed you were a Staten Island ferryboat feeling your

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way across in a thick fog. That is, judging by the sounds."

"I don't know I make snores," says Inez, getting a hurt look into those wide, set gray eyes.

"Few of us do know," says I. "I'm not complaining, either. And if you don't care for the word we'll just put it that you slept eloquently. But what was there bad about this dream of yours? Thought you were being crowded off a cliff by a freight engine, or something like that?"

Inez shakes her head. "No," says she. "I meet black cat walking on his hind legs."

"Why, I shouldn't list that as a nightmare, Inez!" says I. "I'd call that kind of a comic dream."

"Brings bad luck," says Inez, solemn. "I read it in dream book long time ago. Bad luck sure."

"Not if you say the right thing as soon as you've told the dream," says I. "Come on, now. Quick, after me! Six dollars will buy sixteen sick Slovaks a samovar."

And Inez repeats it, eager. "You—you think that stops it, hey?" she demands.

"Absolutely!" says I. "Never known to fail. And now that we've plucked the monkey wrench out of the gears of fate let's hurry around and open up the orangeade booth on daylight saving schedule."

In the front hall, though, we're held up by this

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old maid landlady of ours—the one with the faded smile and the shrewd eyes.

“Ah, young ladies!” says she. “Off to business again?”

“That’s a polite way of putting it,” says I.

“Then I take it that Miss Petersen,” she goes on, “has not yet found her—ah—rich uncle?”

“No,” says I. “An uncle so thoroughly mislaid as Miss Petersen’s isn’t found easy.”

“I was just wondering, my dear,” purrs Miss Wellby, “if you were likely to be permanent guests. You see, I have opportunities for—”

“Quite so,” says I. “But if it will ease your mind any I can state that we’re liable to be with you for some little time. Anyway, we shall plan to give you the usual week’s notice.”

Which little exchange seems to add to Inez’s gloomy thoughts. “I no like how she looks at me, that Miss Wellby,” says she.

“Oh, she’s all right,” says I. “Only she has looked at boarders so long as standing for so many dollars per that at times she gets on that cash-register gaze. Forget it. Gosh! but this is a regular morning, eh?”

“Yes-s-s-s!” says Inez, drawing in about a barrelful of Eighth Avenue ozone, diluted a bit by the exhausts from a lot of motor trucks and delivery cars. “Pretty soon ice go out of lake and vi’lets come in woods by Coleraine.”

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"Quit that homesick stuff, Inez," says I. "Haven't we got Central Park, just across the Circle?"

"Too many bums on benches," says Inez.

"You've said it," says I. "But this wouldn't be New York if we could have it all to ourselves. And here's our cozy little white-tiled booth, waiting for us to unbutton the front and mix up ten gallons of thirst quencher. So pull up your socks and get busy."

"Socks?" asks Inez, gawping at me.

"Mere figure of speech, Inez," says I, "although you'll probably get to rolling yours before the season's over. Gee! but that ice man does make a mess on the sidewalk! Hand me that broom."

Nothing like a little-high speed industry to discourage a jinx. Inside of half an hour Inez was humming a tune between her front teeth as she polished the glasses, and showing her cheek dimples to favored customers. Even when old Popogoulis, the boss, shows up on his daily prow along the orangeade chain she still keeps chipper. And he's been toting half a grouch the last few days, you know, because we haven't towed around Uncle Nels so Popogoulis could ring him in as a heavy investor.

"Huh!" says Popogoulis, after listening to Inez's musical efforts for a minute or two. "May-

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be you feel that way 'cause you find your rich uncle? Hey?"

"No find him yet," says Inez. "Next week, I guess."

"Huh!" says Popogoulis.

And it wasn't two minutes later when this youth with the ingrowing chin starts a hot debate with Inez over the change she's given him.

"Ah, wotcher tryin' to pull on me?" he asks, messy. "I gave yer a two."

"One!" insists Inez. "See?" And she exhibits a dirty bill.

"Two it was," snarls the youth, "and I don't stand for no short-change act from a moll like you."

"Give the gent his change," breaks in Popogoulis.

"But there's no two-dollar bill in the cash drawer," says I, taking a hand. "Besides, Mr. Popogoulis, I've got a line on this young hick. Saw him drift past here yesterday with that pimple-faced sport you fired when you took us on. This is a frame-up."

"Gwan!" says the chinless one. "Gimme my ninety-five."

"Here!" says Popogoulis, counting it out. "Excuse it, please."

"Oh, well!" says I. "If you can afford to shoot the profits that way, all right."

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"You'll find out Saturday, Miss Trilby May," says he, "who pays for mistakes in my business."

"What?" says I. "You'll dock us? Say, you might work that in old Athens, but it don't get past in the U. S. A. Not with this sketch. We decline to be docked."

"So-o-o?" says he, glaring at me with those beady little eyes. "Then you know what you get? The chuck out. Here! I pay you off. Get!"

"Perfectly satisfactory, old Goulash," says I. "Come along, Inez."

"Hey?" says Inez, staring stupid. "What for?"

"We've been handed our release, that's all," says I. "It was coming to us, anyway, I suspect, so we might as well meet it halfway. They're bad enough to get along with, these Greeks, when they're trying to be decent; but when they get crabby it's all off. So long, old dear."

"Bah!" says Popogoulis, slamming the booth gate behind us.

"Meaning Aloah and farewell, I suppose?" says I. "But keep a dry eye, popper, and we'll do the same."

So there we were, turned loose on upper Broadway at 10.15 in the morning, all dressed up in white and nowhere to go. Trust Inez for stating the case frankly and directly.

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"We lose our job, hey?" she asks.

"Crude, but accurate," says I. "We have."

"What we do now?" demands Inez.

"Well," says I, "we might wander over there by the statue of Chris Columbus and shed a few tears, but ten to one a traffic cop would shoo us off and nobody would offer words of sympathy. So why not remember that it's a peach of a day and pretend we're having a vacation?"

There's nothing shifty about her mental processes, though. Inez shakes her head gloomy. "I told you that black-cat dream bring bad luck," says she.

"Yes," says I, "and that isn't the worst of it. You'll keep on telling me, until some day in desperation I shall hide your gum. But now that we have felt the full force of the blow let's buck up and see if we can't grin. Didn't you say something about violets? How about hunting 'em?"

"By Coleraine?" asks Inez.

"No, by Jersey," says I. "There's a ferry somewhere uptown, and here's a duck car bound north. What do you say to making a day of it?"

Somehow it's these unexpected offside excursions that I like best. If we'd had a regular holiday declared for us, as a reward of merit, and had planned to do this a week ahead—well, probably

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it would have rained. Anyway, I'd have frittered away most of my enthusiasm for it before we ever got started. Before we got on the boat we bought some rolls, and a pound of sliced bologna, and a pair of dill pickles, and some sugared doughnuts, and enough gum to last Inez until dark. And when we trailed off the ferry we found a trolley that was going somewhere, and we piled aboard, and in no time at all we were on top of the Palisades with a whole lot of New Jersey spread out before us, and everything all light greens and pale yellow, except the apple trees that stood out like so many pink bouquets.

"Pretty, yes?" says Inez, springing her question and answering it in the same breath, as usual.

"I'm with you, Inez," says I. "And I must say that about this time of year I'm strong for all this sort of thing. Back in Minnesota, when I used to wander out into the clearing on spring mornings, I'd forget how lonesome I was and how little I cared for my stepmother and my half sisters. I've got the same sort of feeling right now. See those hazy hills off there? We'll see how near them this car will take us. Eh?"

And say, we found the slickest place! At a bend in the road there was a pond where a creek had been dammed up, and somebody had built an old-fashioned mill with a water wheel that really turned, and there were some willow trees

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and a stretch of green turf along the bank. All it lacked was a gilt frame to be marked 2.98 and sent to the art department for a bargain-day sale.

"Pretty soft, eh?" says I. "Why should we worry about getting fired when we can drop into anything like this? I have half a mind to yodle. No, now that I remember, I believe I don't yodle very well. But I know what I am going to do, Inez. I'm going to revert."

"Hey?" says Inez.

"Do a throw-back," says I. "That is, I'm going barefoot for a while, and paddle my tootsies in the water."

Inez blinks twice, real rapid, signifying that she's shocked. "By the road," says she, "come automobiles."

"When they do," says I, "I'll duck behind the bushes. But paddle I must."

And I did, for the first time since I left Tamarack Junction and went traveling with a young lady Swede who had a scenario mind. I buried my toes in the mud and then wiggled 'em clean again. It's a gorgeous sensation, working your toes down into soft, black mud, and feeling it ooze between 'em. I know Inez was dying to do it, too, but she didn't dare. But finally she did get real reckless. She took down her hair and let it fall in two great yellow braids over her

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shoulders. Then we stuck the braids full of buttercups and made a wreath that I pinned over her white forehead and behind her ears.

"There!" says I. "You're a dead ringer for Parthenia."

"Who?" asks Inez.

"I forget the details," says I, "but I think she was a queen somewhere."

Inez smiles pleased. "I like to be a queen once," says she. "It would be swell, eh?"

"What simple tastes you have!" says I. "But honest, Inez, I don't think I can manage it. Not to-day, anyway. How about tackling our delicatessen lunch, though? It must be nearly noon. I'm sure I could do with nourishment right now. Park your gum, Inez, and let's spread the feast."

It's lucky I waited and struggled back into my lisle threads and pumps, for just as we were finishing the last of the doughnuts a big touring car pulled in from the road, and the next thing I knew a heavy built man had jumped out, walked around us businesslike, and was announcing to somebody in the tonneau: "All right, Jimmy. Here's the location."

At which Jimmy, who is a sporty dressed young gent, proceeds to unload a tripod machine and set it up.

"How about the peasantry, Mr. Simms?" asks Jimmy.

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"Oh, I'll shunt them when the time comes," says this Simms party, glancing careless at us. "Might as well clear the scene now, though, I suppose. Say, girlyes, toddle off, will you?"

"Meaning us?" says I.

"Sure! I'm looking your way, ain't I?" says Simms.

"That's nice of you," says I. "But why rush us? We were here first and we haven't got to the toddling stage yet."

"Well, you'd better," says he. "We're going to shoot here presently, and you'll be in the way."

Then I gave him the grin. "Shoot, if you must, this near-red head, but spare your country's flag, she said," says I, quoting free. "Don't budge, Inez. Nothing but a fresh movie director who thinks he owns the earth."

"Haw-haw!" says Jimmy, registering merri-ment. "Guess you've run against something this time, Mr. Simms."

But Simms hadn't worked at his job without learning a thing or two about the female of the species. He takes off his hat and bows polite. "My error, young ladies," says he. "You are perfectly within your rights and I wouldn't think of disturbing your repast for worlds. But when you have quite finished—"

"You win, Mr. Simms," says I. "Sir Walter

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Raleigh couldn't have done it better. And we'll move anywhere you say, any time. But if there's to be picture taking I'm sure my friend Miss Petersen would be thrilled if she could stay somewhere on the sidelines and see it done."

"We shall be honored, Miss—er—" and he pauses, inquiring.

"Dodge," says I. "Trilby May Dodge, if you care for the whole of it."

"I do," says he. "Trilby May, eh? Sort of ripples from the tongue, doesn't it? Wouldn't go bad on a program. But pardon me. There, Jimmy! How do you get the light on me here? Good! Trees and water in the background, eh? Now if that fool bunch of people will only show up we can—"

"Coming up!" says Jimmy, as another touring car tears around the curve.

And as I am leading Inez out of range of the camera she grips me excited by the sleeve. "Is—is it moving-picture actors, honest?" she whispers, husky.

"None other," says I. "See, some of 'em have their costumes all on and are making up their faces and hands."

"They—they look dead," says Inez.

"A little ghastly," says I. "But I hear they have to do that so they'll take well in the pictures. Kind of a lucky break for us, eh? Being

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right in on a thing like this. Now you'll know how it's done, all that stuff you get so excited over when you see it on the screen. Jimmy's the one that does the taking. He'll turn the crank on his machine when he starts. And Mr. Simms is the boss of the whole outfit. If you don't believe it, listen."

He was announcing that he was all ready, Mr. Simms was, and reminding 'em rather crisp that he didn't propose to wait around more than an hour more for a lot of people who didn't know the value of time.

"Come, now," he goes on, "let's go. Somebody help Miss Waters with her robe there, and—Say, Miss Waters, you haven't even got your wig on yet."

"Of course I haven't, Mr. Simms," says Miss Waters, a generous built young lady with snappy black eyes. "I don't sleep in it, you know; and I wasn't going to wear it all the way from Fort Lee, was I? Estelle, hand me that blond abomination from the prop. suitcase, will you?"

But after pawing around frantic for a minute or two, Estelle says, "There's no wig to be found."

"What!" snorts Mr. Simms, letting loose his real director's voice. "No wig for Queen Fulda? Say, that's interesting, that is!"

Then, after he'd gone to the car and made a thorough search himself, he said a few other

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things. Some were sarcastic remarks, and others were straight from the shoulder. Most of them, too, were directly for the benefit of Miss Waters. You could tell that from the flashes her black eyes threw off. And the next thing Mr. Simms knew he was being told a few things by Miss Waters.

Who was he talking to, anyway, she'd like to know? She was there to work at her art, she'd have him understand, and not to be bawled out by any mere hundred-dollar-a-week director. Not her. No. Not when the Paramount people were simply begging her to sign a two years' contract at twice the money she was getting from this bunch of cheap skates. Huh! Mr. Simms could apologize and send back for the wig, or he could go twiddle his thumbs. She—Miss Waters—didn't give a hoot which.

"But see here, Miss Waters," he begins, "you know how important it is for us to—"

"I know I'm through with you, that's what I know," snaps Miss Waters, dipping a wash rag vigorous into a cold-cream jar and rubbing off the make-up.

"Oh, very well," says Simms, indulging in a sigh.

He was a patient, long-suffering person—when he had to be. He shrugs his shoulders and gazes around at the little group of actors who are



BUT FINALLY SHE DID GET RECKLESS. SHE TOOK DOWN HER
HAIR AND LET IT FALL IN TWO GREAT YELLOW BRAIDS OVER
HER SHOULDERS



maintaining a strict neutrality. Nobody suggests anything or points a way out.

And about then, for no reason and from no cause that I can explain, Inez lets out this throaty chuckle of hers.

Of course, everyone looked our way, including Mr. Simms. At which Inez should have been fussed. She wasn't. She merely takes another bite from our last doughnut and returns the stares.

"Great Pedro!" gasps Mr. Simms, punching Jimmy in the ribs. "Look!"

"Eh?" says Jimmy.

"Queen Fulda's wig!" says he. And the next thing I knew he had bounced over in front of us.

"Pardon me, Miss Dodge," says he, "but—ah—is that hair of your friend's the real thing, or—"

"It grows on her," says I.

"Just my luck!" says he. "It takes a lot to beat Bill Simms, too. Of course, though, if she can't take it off, there's no use— Yes, there is! Hey, Jimmy! Come have a close-up. How about her, eh? With the robes on and all would you know the difference, yourself? Would you, now?"

"I dunno as I would," admits Jimmy.

"Then it's merely a question of whether the young lady is willing to help us out of a hole," says he.

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"You mean—" says I, and stares from him to Inez.

"Doing a few hundred feet of Queen Fulda for us?" says he. "It's a simple scene."

"It would have to be," says I. "Wait. I'll ask her. Listen, Inez. You were saying a little while ago that you'd like to be a queen just once. Well, here's your chance. What do you think?"

"I—I think it would be swell," says Inez.

And right there, with Miss Waters looking on and biting her nails, we dressed Inez in the robes of royalty, draped a gorgeous jeweled girdle around her waist, put a glittery brass crown on her head, and led her in front of the camera. For a minute, too, I thought she was going to get away with it. But no sooner does Mr. Simms begin explaining to her what she was supposed to do than she ducks that Goddess of Liberty chin of hers and gets on that foolish simper.

"No, no!" he shouts. "Not that way. Keep your chin up."

At which Inez ducks it all the more. He worked for ten minutes, getting more desperate every second, with Inez rapidly lapsing into that rigid, wooden state which is almost as bad as a coma.

"Excuse me, Mr. Simms, but you won't get anywhere with her that way," says I.

"Then how?" he demands.

"Perhaps," says I, "if you could dope out to

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me just what you want her to do, I might get her to perform."

"But—but I'm supposed to be director here," he objects.

"Can you talk Minnesota?" I asks.

"No," says he. "I was born in Brooklyn. Go to it, Miss Dodge. You see, the plot of the story is like this—" And he proceeds to sketch it, hasty.

"I get you," says I. "The queen has escaped from the tower where the old kink has had her shut up, and while she's wandering by the water frontage along comes this young Sir Percey Goofus, or whatever name he flags by, and he's the one she's been vamping through the iron bars. Isn't that the main idea?"

"Exactly," says he.

"Then we're off," says I. "Come, Inez, pry yourself out of that trance and don't look like you'd been kicked in a vital spot by a tin mule. And listen closely to your Trilby May."

"All right!" chants Inez, in that cheerful sing-song of hers. "How I should act, hey?"

"Like a queen, dearie, and I know you'll do it fine," says I, soothing. "That's right. Chuck the big-casino stuff and look like a face card. See, you've got on the clothes and the jewelry, and you've just strayed out from the palace by the back door. You're the leading lady of the

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land, remember, and nobody can hand you any rough stuff and live. You're the whole works, barring the old king, that you've just naturally lost your taste for. That's better! Pep and dignity, with your chin well off your necklace and limber motions in your knees. Perfectly swell. Now, right along the bank there, careless and natural, as if you were back in Coleraine looking for violets. How about it, Mr. Simms?"

"That's a queenly tread if I ever saw one," says Simms. "Shoot, Jimmy, while she's coming toward you. All ready, Sir Percey! Come on when Miss Dodge gives you the word. Better tell her about him."

"Sure," says I. "Keep walking, Inez, but don't look up yet. For something elegant is going to happen to you in about a minute. Uh-huh! You're going to meet up with your Percey boy. You're crazy about him, you know, and he's just as nutty over you, but you didn't know he was nearer than Buffalo. He is, though. He's right behind that bush at the left and now he's—Get a move on, Sir Percey. Now you see her, and it stops you in your tracks. Now forward, with your arms out and a mushy look on your face. Your turn, Inez! You spot him. Fluttery with the eyes, head drooping modest like an Easter lily. That's putting it over! Now for the clinch, Percey, and don't ease up on it. You

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got an armful coming to you, I'll say. Rush her! Come through, Inez. This is no one-sided hugging match, you know. It's a twosome, and you've been dreaming about Sir Percey for the last month. There! Now you're going to be kissed, and see that you let him make it a long, lingering one, like you've seen on the screen so often. M-m-m-m-m! I expect that 'll do. I say, Inez, can't you let go, unless Mr. Simms wants to enter you two for the long-distance record."

"Cut it, Jimmy," says Simms. "And if that don't make 'em sit up in the back rows I'm a poor guesser."

Even at that I had to step in and tap Inez on the shoulder before she would break the strangle hold. "It's all over, Inez," says I. "You've qualified as a royal kisser, all right."

"I'll say she has," murmurs Sir Percey, as he backs off to a safe distance.

"And allow me to state, Miss Dodge," says Simms, "that you're a born assistant director. I'll bet we've got three hundred feet of as good outdoor stuff as was ever put on celluloid. But we shall need you and Inez in the studio to finish the film. I hope you have no engagements that—"

"We're strictly at liberty, Mr. Simms," says I, "but we can't afford to do this just for the fun of the thing."

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"I should say not," says he. "Will twenty-five a day be satisfactory?"

"I—I'll have to ask Inez," says I, gaspy. "You see, she is expecting to find her rich uncle and—there, there, Inez! Don't try to talk now, or you'll swallow your gum again. Yes, I think she's willing, Mr. Simms."

"Good!" says he. "Report at ten to-morrow morning at the studio. Here's a card with the address. And if you don't mind driving back with the camera, Jimmy and I will give you a lift home."

It wasn't until we were crossing the ferry that I had this late thought about Popogoulis, and I saved it up until we were almost down to Columbus Circle.

"Oh, there's one of those orangeade booths, Mr. Simms!" says I. "Could you let us off here? I've got a thirst like a dry radiator."

"Allow me," says Mr. Simms, hopping out gallant in front of the booth. "Boy! Two glasses of that for the young ladies, and make it snappy."

And who should come trotting out to the curb but our old friend, Pimple Face, while Popogoulis gawps button-eyed at us from behind the counter.

"What a nice, polite youth!" says I to Inez, as we hands back the empty glasses. "We must stop here often. Eh?"

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And Inez obliges with that inane chuckle of hers.

Not until we got back to the boarding house did I dare ask her about her kissing match with Sir Percey. "Judging by the way you went at it, Inez," says I, "I should hardly call that an amateur performance. Where did you do so much practicing?"

"Me?" says Inez. "I have fellers by Coleraine, ain't I? By Duluth, too."

"But never before, I'll bet," says I, "one who wore blue silk tights and a velvet cap with an ostrich plume in it."

"Well," says Inez, "I ain't been queen before."

Chapter V

Breaking Wrong for Inez

TO start out in the morning as an orangeade dipper and finish the day as a movie actress is what I'd call a broad jump. That's the record of Miss Inez Petersen up to date, as I was telling you. And you would almost think she'd be so thrilled over it that she couldn't sleep. Yet I didn't notice that Inez found any trouble in tearing off the usual nine hours of slumber that night, some of it more or less musical.

As for me, before I could stop the wheels going round, I had to dally with rosy dreams of the future. I could map out a career for Inez that had Mary Pickford's life story reading like a sketch of an old-maid school-teacher. I could see Inez climbing the stepladder of fame, with me steadying it all the while and coaching her along, first as a substitute leading lady in a Fort Lee studio, then as a regular star, until we finally wound up at the Los Angeles movie heaven with our own producing company and a double-breasted bungalow at Hollywood. I even got so

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far as to wonder how many secretaries it would take to autograph her photos for fans, and I pictured the kind of sport speedster we'd drive to work in. I was a little vague about the type of motor, but I knew it would have three sets of windshields and so many spare tires on back that the rear end would look like a caterpillar or the tail of a rattler.

"Well, Inez," says I, next morning, "how do you feel about it?"

"Oh, all right," says she, casual. "How do you feel, Trilby May?"

"Me?" says I. "A good deal like a she Svengali who isn't sure of being able to deliver the trance stuff when called for."

At which Inez favors me with one of those simple stares of hers. "Like what?" she demands.

"Somebody in the book I was named for," says I. "It was an old-timer that paw had around the house, and I read it when I was little."

"Huh!" says Inez. "You read lotta books, hey?"

"Oh, I'm no female highbrow," says I, "but I've browsed around enough to know that Rex Beach isn't a seashore resort, or George Ade some kind of a soft drink. I got the reading habit when I was young and was never able to break off. You see, paw brought on two trunks when

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he moved from Connecticut to Dodge's Clearing, Minnesota, and as near as I could make out they were mainly filled with books. Nothing valuable or choice. Just an odd collection, mostly picked up second hand or borrowed and never returned. Some in ragged paper bindings, like *The Light That Failed* and *Lord Jim*. Then there was the second volume of *Les Misérables* in faded blue cloth covers that somebody had spilled something sticky on, and *Treasure Island*, with the back ripped off, and *A Tramp Abroad*, with the stamp of Torrington, Connecticut, Public Library on the fly leaf, and *Ivanhoe* and *To Have and to Hold*, and *A Window in Thrums*, and *Captain Cook's Voyages*, and *The House of Mirth*, and Stanley's thick book on how he found Livingstone, and dozens of others that I could name, but will not, Inez dear."

"You—you don't read 'em all?" asks Inez.

I nods. "Every last one," says I, "between twelve and sixteen, and most of them I went through two or three times. What else was there for me to do in a place like Dodge's Clearing? Of course, another frying pan, and a hand sewing machine, and a few old clothes to make over, would have been more useful things to have imported from Connecticut if paw knew he was going to settle down in the pine flats three miles from a store. But he just brought the books,

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and let it go at that. Paw's long suit, that was. And I guess it was a good thing for me. It got me the job of teaching the Junction school for two terms before I was eighteen, and I suppose that reading has helped me pick the right words when I feel like exercising a tongue that Mrs. Ephraim Dodge No. 3 used to tell me was as limber as a mule whip. Anyway, I can generally separate myself from any thoughts that happen to occur to me."

"I think you talk swell," says Inez. "Some day I—I gonna read a book."

"That's a noble ambition, Inez," says I, "but for the present you don't need to worry about improving your mind. In fact, if you should, I'm afraid your standing as a budding movie star would wobble under the strain. All you need do to-day is act natural and listen close when I coach you. Also, we'd better be making tracks for Fort Lee, for you remember how sore Mr. Simms got yesterday when that Miss Waters was late."

"Her!" says Inez, scornful. "I think she no like me."

"I'm dead sure of it, Inez," says I. "One seldom is crazy over the party who crowds one out of a fat job. But we can't help that. What we've got to do now is make good. So let's go."

It looked simple enough, but somehow I had

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a hunch that you couldn't break into the movies quite so easy. Not as a rule. If you could there'd be many an idle typewriter in the land, many a vacancy behind the shirtwaist counter. And we'd no sooner located this studio over in Fort Lee and found the main entrance than we ran up against the first hurdle. It was in the shape of a bald-headed, sour-faced person who sat tilted back in a chair just inside the door. He was puffing away at a pipe directly under a big "No Smoking" sign, and he was decorated with a tin badge pinned to one suspender

"Say, where do you Lizzies think you're crashin' in?" he demands. "This ain't no free parking space for up-state tourists."

"Not meaning us, I hope?" says I.

"Yes, youse," says he. "Back up there."

"But this is the place where the True Art Films Company is making pictures, isn't it?" I asks.

"Says so on the door, don't it?" he snaps. "And that's why they put me here—to chase off neck stretchers like youse. Beat it, now, before I get rough."

"What an unpleasant party!" says I. "Listen, mister; you've got us wrong. We belong to the company; just joined. And Miss Petersen here has been signed up as leading lady. So one side, please."

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"Ah, who do you think you're kiddin'?" says he, glancing from me to Inez with cold scorn. "That a leadin' lady! Say, I'm no sap. Chase back to the ferry, both of you, before I—"

"Remove him, Inez," says I.

"Hey?" says Inez. "You mean—"

"Uh-huh," says I, motioning with my thumb. "Outside. It's the only way for us to be on time. Now!"

And as I holds the door open Inez grabs him firmly by the collar, yanks him struggling from the chair, and tosses him out into the sunlight as easy and careless as she would empty a pan of ashes from the back stoop. I was just locking the door on the inside when I heard a chuckle, and turned to find the director, Mr. Simms, who has appeared in time to see the end of the argument.

"Well!" says he. "That's one way to get past a doorkeeper. I'm sorry, young ladies. I should have told Mike about you."

"Oh, that's perfectly all right, Mr. Simms," says I. "Inez needs the exercise. And I guess Mike will have his company manners on next time. We didn't want to be late, you see."

He grins, brings Mike in, and makes him apologize, and tells us we're the first to show up.

"Fine!" says I. "Maybe you'll have time, then, to run over with me what Inez is expected to do to-day."

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"Here!" says he, handing me a lot of crumpled typewritten sheets. "Perhaps you can get something out of this fool script while I'm having the inside tower set placed. You'll find a quiet spot over there in No. 3."

And for the next half hour I studied this typed puzzle, which was meant to tell the story of how Queen Fulda tried to smuggle her lover, Sir Percey Goofus, into the palace, but was trapped by the old king, who plotted to have 'em both walled up in a tower room and leave 'em there forever. The yarn was a good deal muddled, though, by cuts to outside locations that brought in other characters.

"Well?" says Inez, who has camped comfortable in a Roman chair and is chewing her gum placid.

"It starts easy enough," says I. "You tow Sir Percey into the tower without any opposition and you find that somebody has set up what you would probably call a real swell feed—fruit, and chicken casserole, and fancy cakes. You think some of your ladies in waiting have fixed things up for you. And of course, before you tackle the eats, you and Sir Percey go to another fond clinch, just to show that you're still dead in love with each other. There'll be a close-up of that and you'll have to make it as mushy as you know how. Just forget the make-up on his face

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and gaze into his eyes like he was a plate of ham and eggs and you'd been all day without food. Think you can put that over?"

Inez nods careless. "Sure," says she.

"But the hard part comes later," I goes on, "when you've finished luncheon, or whatever it is—you don't really have to eat all that stuff, you know—and you ring for the hired girl to come for the tray. Nobody comes. Then you pull the bell cord a couple of times impatient, and at last you open the door to find that it's been bricked up. Must have had some speedy bricklayers in those days, or else Queen Fulda was a mighty slow eater. Anyway, there you are, penned in for keeps, and it's a hard jolt for you when you get hep to the low-down trick that the old king has played on you. You get the idea gradually, you know, and the close-ups will have to show the notion filtering down into your brain. That 'll call for business with the eyes. Like this—see? Now you try it. No, Inez, not with the mouth, as if you were trying to swallow him, or were being interviewed by a dentist. Keep the lips closed and let the eyes get big and round by degrees, same as you blow up a toy balloon. Strain 'em. Try to think how a queen would feel in a case like that. Nothing to eat but shoe leather, nothing to drink, and nothing to do but sit down and watch your beloved

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Percey die a slow, lingering death. Now you're getting the idea. And if you'll save that up and come through strong with it when I give you the word, it'll be a knockout."

"We—we get out, after while, eh?" asks Inez.

"I should hope so," says I.

But say, I must have made Inez see that starvation act vivid, for she worked up a luncheon appetite long before noontime, and if I hadn't been able to send out for a couple of sandwiches I don't think we could have held her in the studio. As it was, I had to get her into her royal robes while she was still busy with a hot dog and a buttered roll, but by the time she was called for she was got up as one of the huskiest queens that ever faced a camera.

The scene was going fine, too, barring the fact that Sir Percey seemed a little shy about getting in near enough for Inez to give him the fond tackle, and Mr. Simms had to prod him two or three times.

"Play up, Sir Percey, play up!" he urges. "She can't hug you at that distance, you know. What's the matter with you, man?"

"Matter!" grumbles Sir Percey. "Say, my ribs are sore from the one she gave me yesterday."

"Oh, hang your ribs!" says Simms. "We're not trying to stage a catch-as-can wrestling

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match. Get in there. That's the stuff. Grab her. Now gaze in her eyes fond and passionate before you glue your lips to hers. That's enough. Kiss her!"

"Give him as good as he brings, Inez," I adds, "but don't lean on him so heavy; you'll buckle his knees."

And there, with the big arc lights sputtering above, and the batteries of blue lights blazing from three sides, and Mr. Simms and me coaching them from beside the camera, they put over this touching love scene in regulation movie fashion. Right in the midst of it arrives this slick-hair, pasty-faced young gent with the prominent beak.

"I say, Simms," he breaks in, "who is this?"

"Eh?" says Mr. Simms, turning to him. "Oh, it's you, is it, Morrie? Mean the new Queen Fulda? Oh, she's one I picked up when Waters quit on me. How do you like her, eh?"

"Why, she's a scream!" says Morrie. "Not the type at all. Too big, Simms, far too big. Might do in a Sennett comedy—but in a serious costume play—never in the world."

"But she's getting it over," insists Simms. "Watch those eyes register."

"Bah!" says Morrie. "I tell you she isn't at all the type I had in mind when I wrote the script. I won't have my play spoiled by any fat queen, either."

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"Oh, come, Morrie, be reasonable!" pleads Mr. Simms. "Miss Petersen may be a little husky for the part, but if she does it well nobody will notice that. Besides, you can't dictate every detail. I'm the director here, remember."

"And I'm the author," shouts Morrie, getting pink in the ears. "These are my characters; this is my story."

"Since when was it yours?" I asks, stepping to the front.

"Eh? Whaddye mean?" he demands. "Didn't I write it?"

"Maybe," says I. "But Edith Wharton wrote it first. Why, you've pinched all this walling-up business straight from one of her yarns. Honest, Mr. Simms, I can bring you the book it's in. His story! Bah!"

"Who—who the blazes are you?" asks Morrie, glaring at me.

"I'm Miss Petersen's Svengali," says I. "Trilby May Dodge, by name, and a trainer of budding movie stars by profession. It's a gift that I've only discovered recent, and I don't mean to have the game bugged by any two-by-four studio hack that steals his plots from old magazines."

"Wha-a-at!" gasps Morrie. "A female freak like you dares to—"

"Draw it easy, Morrie," says I, "or I'll sic

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the publishers on you with a copyright injunction."

"And I'll back her up, Morrie," says Mr. Simms. "It's a rotten script, anyway, outside of one or two scenes, and you've got no call to get chesty over it. Now if you know when you're well off, you'll do a fade-out and leave Miss Dodge and me to finish this session."

"So you think you can make a door mat out of me that way, do you, Bill Simms?" snarls Morrie. "Well, I'll show you. I was looking for some move like this when Miss Waters told me what a raw deal you gave her yesterday. But we've got somebody outside who'll show you where you get off. Mr. Herts."

"Oh, gosh!" says Mr. Simms.

And as Morris goes dashing out Simms explains to me. "The backer," says he. "It's his money we're running on. President of the company. And the only reason he strayed from the cloak-and-suit business to take up this side line was because Lou Waters had a chance to vamp him. I see rocks ahead, Miss Dodge, if he's here."

"Oh, well!" says I. "But I mean to stand up for Inez to the last breath."

"It won't do a bit of good, I'm afraid," says Simms. "And here they come."

Sure enough, they were bearing down on us in full force; first Morrie, with his black eyes

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blazing wrathful; then Miss Lulu Waters, a sneer curling her classic lips; and last of all this poddy party with the beady little eyes and the flat, flabby ears. Mr. Herts comes blinking into the studio light, and don't seem quite at home. But at an elbow jab from Miss Waters he gets into action.

"See here, Simms," says he, "I don't like you to treat Miss Waters this way. You can't fire her, understand."

"Then I can't make the film," says Simms. "She refused to work yesterday."

"I did nothing of the kind, Simms," puts in Miss Waters. "I declined to be bullied, that's all."

"Perfectly right," says Herts. "You shouldn't talk that rough stuff to a lady, Simms."

"And look what he had the nerve to put in my place," says Miss Waters. "Just take a look, Hertsy, will you?"

"Yes," I cuts in, "take two looks, Mr. Herts. And stick around while you see her work a little. Say, if she don't look more like a queen than Miss Waters here, I'll eat the film. Besides, she's doing it for fifty a week, and if you know what Miss Waters is costing you you can figure the difference.

But Hertsy, old boy, shakes his head. "I don't care for costs," says he. "Miss Waters is

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a great artist. I am going to make her known to the American public. So you and your fat friend can get out."

"But I have engaged them to finish the film," protests Mr. Simms.

"Well, well!" says Herts, "that makes no difference. Pay 'em two weeks' wages and let 'em go. I got my contract with Miss Waters, ain't I? We got to stand by that. And if you don't like it, Mr. Simms, you can—"

"He needn't," says I. "If that's the way it stands, we'll quit. Only you don't know what you're missing, I'll say. Come, Inez. It's all over. Take off the royal raiment and we'll collect what's coming to us."

We did, too. Mr. Herts makes out a check on the spot, and Mr. Simms follows us to the door.

"Tough luck, Miss Dodge," says he, "but what can you do with an old fool like that?"

"Nothing but revamp him," says I, "and neither Inez nor I are willing to tackle the part."

"I don't blame you," says he. "But say, I wish you'd leave me your address. I may get in with some regular people before long, and might want to use you. There's always a chance."

So we hang our names on the hook, as it were, and go trailing back across the river with our chins down and all our rosy dreams turned the

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color of a slate roof. At least, that's the way I felt, and I supposed Inez was in the same low state of mind. Of course, she has retrieved her gum and is yanking away with a regular jaw stroke, just as though she hadn't seen fame and fortune slip between her fingers.

Not until we had climbed up to Riverside Drive and settled ourselves in front seats on the upper deck of a green bus did I have the heart to open the painful subject.

"Well, Inez," says I, "I suppose there's no use grinding our teeth over it, but things certainly did break against us. And Los Angeles seemed so near."

Inez rolls her gray eyes at me, but no remarks get through the gum.

"I was going to have the bungalow living room done in oyster white with lettuce-green hangings, and the tiling of the living room floor was to show a map of Minnesota with Tamarack Junction indicated by a red star. What I regret most, though, is the sport-type speedster. Oh, lady, but that was to be some boat!"

"Hey?" says Inez, missing two strokes.

"Oh, to be sure," says I, "you are feeling worse about not seeing your name in electric lights over some Broadway movie entrance; or is it that you'll miss more the daily bushel of letters from fans?"

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"What you talk about?" demands Inez.

And then I took my turn staring at her. "You don't mean, Inez," says I, "that with your fingers almost on the tail feathers of success you didn't picture the shy bird roosting on your shoulder and cooing soothing notes in your ear?"

"I don't see any bird," says Inez.

"Let me put it plainer," says I. "Didn't you picture yourself making a big hit as a movie star, getting signed up at a Babe Ruth salary, and having things soft and easy for the rest of your life?"

Inez shakes her head. "Such foolishness!" says she.

"Quite right," says I. "But, anyway, you must have had a few thrills while you were acting a queen part. Now don't tell me you didn't."

"I dunno," says Inez. "You get bossed around a lot. I don't like that so much."

"Who would suspect, Inez," says I, looking at her curious, "that you had such a sensitive soul? I'll bet I can name one little item of the day's work, though, that you have no kick on. How about those long, lingering ones you swapped with Sir Percey?"

At which Inez ducks her head and giggles.

"Well?" I insists, "own up."

"His—his false mustache almost comes off once," she chuckles.

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"No wonder," says I. "Only a real one could have stood the strain you put on it. But that isn't the point. I'm asking if you didn't like that part?"

"Huh!" says Inez, shrugging her shoulders. "Too much grease stuff. Taste like lard."

Which leaves me speechless for nearly two minutes, and that's almost a record for me. "Inez," says I at last, "I don't get you at all. I thought you must have some bump of imagination, just a little one, but I'm afraid the place where it ought to be is a dimple. You want all your romance strained through the silver screen, don't you?"

"You mean we go to Mister Bill Hart matinee show?" asks Inez, chirking up.

"Why not?" says I. "We have no job to bother us."

Chapter VI

Trilby and the False Alarms

I'LL say this much for Inez: she's a self-starter. She may not look it, with those placid eyes and the restful way she has of manipulating her gum. And her conversation is surely as sketchy as it can be made without using a code. But somehow she manages to get things going.

Even here, when we're spending a few workless and jobless days at Miss Wellby's boarding house. And when we first came to this prunery, you know, Inez acted just as much at home as if she was a young elephant lately imported from the jungle. Of course, she didn't sway restless and flap her ears. Inez hasn't that kind of ears. But for a week she hardly took her eyes off her plate during meals, and I couldn't get a word out of her when anyone else was in the dining room. She seemed to lapse into a rigid, wooden state, almost as lifelike as a dress model in a show window. I understood. Part of that was due to her Swedish disposition and the rest was her backwoods bringing up.

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By degrees, though, she got so that she would stare around cautious, until she saw some one looking her way, and when she found it was quite possible to size 'em up without personal injury, she rolled her eyes quite a lot.

"Well, Inez," I asked her once, "what's your verdict on Miss Wellby's collection of homo more-or-less sapiens?"

"Hey?" says Inez, blinking suspicious at me.

"What do you think of the bunch?" I translates.

"Lotta freaks," announces Inez, prompt. "Eh?"

"Oh, no more so than the usual run," says I. "They're strangers, that's all. We may look freaky to them, too, you know."

"Huh!" says Inez, unconvinced.

"Fact," says I. "But they're getting used to us and don't gawp quite as much as they did when we first came. Some seem almost human. For instance, the stout lady with the high chest and the gray streak through her front hair. She's been nodding at me almost folksy. See! She's smiling across at you now."

"Oh yes-s-s!" says Inez, almost returning the smile. "I kinda like her."

"She's a Mrs. Marvin, and has the third-floor front," says I. "Ruby, the waitress, told me. Then there's the young lady vamp who always

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wears a big, floppy hat—the one over at the little table by the wall. How about her?”

“Her I no like,” says Inez. “Stuck up.”

“Not necessarily,” says I. “Second-floor hall bedroom. Comes from some little town in Maryland and is taking voice culture. Probably a village belle who hopes to break into grand opera. Here’s a snappy young person just drifting in. Now, how does he strike you, Inez?”

“Fresh,” says Inez.

“None fresher,” says I. “But you don’t expect a high-class automobile salesman to be a shrinking violet, do you? Ruby says he’s a free tipper, too, and she ought to know. Her favorite, though, seems to be the other young chap at the same table—the one with the slick light hair and the smiling blue eyes. I notice she always serves him first.”

Inez ventures a sidewise glance and nods approving. “Kinda nice,” says she. “What’s he do?”

“Let’s ask Ruby,” says I. “My guess is that he’s a clerk in a jewelry store, flat silver department. Looks sort of quiet and refined and as if he could say, ‘Yes, madam, we’ll have them marked and sent. Certainly, madam.’”

But Ruby says I’ve made a poor guess. “That’s Mister Barry Platt,” says she. “Writes pieces for the newspaper. Smart, he is. Nice

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feller, too. Gives me tickets to shows sometimes."

"There's your chance, Inez," says I, as Ruby goes out after two orders of lamb stew for us. "Put the spell of the Iron Range on him. Show him your dimples. Eh? Don't think you can vamp him at this distance? Say, when he's so easy he gives theater passes to an Afro-American brunette from East One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street, a real ash blonde from Duluth, like you, ought to have a walk-away."

But Inez only ducks her head and simpers. "Maybe you get acquainted with him first," she suggests.

"If that's a defi, watch me," says I.

Somehow I had a hunch that this Mrs. Marvin was the one to get on chatty terms with first. She seemed to know almost everybody in the dining room, nodding familiar to the different tables as she came and went, and stopping here and there for a word. So I didn't hesitate to spring my smile on her next time she passed, and before the week was out we were real folksy.

Knowing Mrs. Marvin was worth while, too. It was almost as good as taking the local paper in a small town. She could, and did, tell us something about nearly everybody in the house. "Isn't Miss Wellby a dear?" she rattles on. "Not the sort of person one usually finds running

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a boarding house. Very well connected, I am told; old Baltimore family—her father was a judge or something. And there's quite a romance about her not being married. She was a beauty at nineteen and became engaged to a young man she met in Washington, some one connected with a foreign embassy. It turned out that he was really of royal blood and wasn't allowed to marry out of his class. And after an affair such as that—well?" At which Mrs. Marvin spreads out her hands.

"Naturally," says I. "If one can't be a princess one can at least be a landlady."

"Oh, that happened years later, after she'd lost nearly all her property," explains Mrs. Marvin. "You've noticed that sweet little Miss Polly Powell, too, haven't you? The one in the picture hat. She has a wonderful voice, they say, but I do hope it isn't so that she's thinking of going on at the Winter Garden in the chorus. Wouldn't that be a shame?"

I agreed that it would; not that I begrudged that particular chorus something which would make it easy to listen to as well as easy to see, but it seemed to be the thing to say.

Also, Mrs. Marvin told us that the lame man with the very pink bald head was Mr. Campbell, a Scotch clerk in the linen department of a big Fifth Avenue store, and that he was a good deal

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of a grouch, but wrote every Sunday to his old mother in Glasgow, and never read any other newspaper than the *Glasgow Herald*, which came every Friday. She pointed out a dried-up little old lady who wore a neck ruff and a big cameo pin, and whispered that years ago she had been named as co-respondent in a sensational divorce case, but that now she was quite respectable and had a married daughter living in Flushing.

"Really!" says I. "And how about the two young men at your left? Anything thrilling about them?"

"Oh, you mean Barry Platt and Penfield White?" says Mrs. Marvin. "Barry is such a nice boy, but so quiet. He's trying to write a play. And Penny's a good sport. Plays good game of bridge, goes around a lot. They room together, though I shouldn't think they'd be a bit congenial. Men are odd that way. But then, so are women, too, at times. Now, you two girls are such opposite types, yet you seem to be great friends. Always known each other, have you?"

So I had to sketch out for her how Inez and I met for the first time at Tamarack Junction only two years ago, how we toured Minnesota as a waitress team, and how we had come to New York to look for an Uncle Nels, who seemed to be permanently lost in the discards.

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"Isn't that interesting!" says Mrs. Marvin. "Why, Mr. Marvin makes Duluth every season on his Western trip. Building hardware is his line, you know, and he simply despises being on the road, because he has to be away from me so much. I get frightfully lonesome, too, but he hopes to be made Eastern sales manager next year, and then we shall have a home of our own, a dear little apartment where I can cook dainty things when I feel like it, and entertain my friends. I'm horribly domestic, you know."

"Yes?" says I. I shouldn't have guessed it if she hadn't said so, but I tried not to look surprised.

Anyway, after a few more chats with Mrs. Marvin we almost felt as though we'd lived at Mrs. Wellby's for years. The different people seemed a lot more like regular persons, and we got to nodding friendly to a few of 'em. Inez was especially taken with Mrs. Marvin. She's a prize listener, Inez, and while at first she'd sit with her ears open and her lips shut, at last she got so she'd chatter away folksy, saying almost a dozen words during a half-hour session.

And it must have been once when I wasn't present, about the time Inez was enjoying her one-day engagement as a movie actress, that she shattered all her speech records and confided in

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Mrs. Marvin the full details of her wonderful run of luck. I didn't guess it at the time, but it came out a little later.

To be exact, this was the third day of our big loaf, after I'd convinced Inez that with a whole hundred dollars to the good there was no need of our rushing frantic into some job that we wouldn't care for. It seemed to worry Inez to be without any regular work, even for a short time, but I persuaded her that the wheels of commerce would spin along just the same if we kept our hands off for a little while.

So on this particular evening we were lingering over the dessert—canned peaches and bakery jelly roll—and chatting with Mrs. Marvin, when Ruby comes in with the big announcement:

"Genn'leman to see Miss Petersen," says she. "He—he's her uncle."

"Wha-a-t!" says I. "What makes you think he's her uncle?"

"He says so," says Ruby.

"He—he got whiskers?" demands Inez.

"Mustache," says Ruby. "Funny ol' gink. Tall hat, cane, an' all."

"The rich uncle at last!" says Mrs. Marvin, patting Inez on the shoulder. "Isn't that splendid!"

As usual, Inez is taking it calm, or seems to be. The real facts are, though, that as yet the

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idea has only begun to percolate down through the bony part.

"Uncle Nels?" asks Inez, turning to me.

"That's the rumor," says I. "But if it is, he must have second sight or be mighty clever with the ouija board. How could he know you were here? Where have you parked him, Ruby?"

"Front parlor," says Ruby. "He gotta big box of candy."

"Oh!" says Inez. "That's Uncle Nels, sure! I must fix my hair."

"Of course," chimes in Mrs. Marvin. "And hadn't you better change your blouse for that fetching champagne-colored net affair? You want to look your best, you know."

"Sure!" says Inez.

"All right," says I. "You help her doll up, Mrs. Marvin, while I hold Uncle Nels in the parlor."

I'll admit I was a bit excited, myself. It was natural enough, for long ago I'd given up ever finding this rich uncle that Inez had talked so much about. I'd almost come to believe he was a myth; and here, just as we're wondering what we'll do next, he appears like a bolt from the blue, or words to that effect. I wondered if he'd come in his limousine. As I went through the front hall I took a peek outside, but I couldn't locate any classy motor.

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And when I spots this freaky-looking old boy sitting on the edge of the sofa with an antique Ben Harrison lid balanced on his knees, I was some disappointed. Of course, knowing that the Petersen family had been shipped into Minnesota with yellow immigrant tags tied to 'em only a generation ago, I wasn't looking for any snappy dresser like Bob Lafolette or Charles Evan Hughes. Still, why should a retired lumber plute wear a shiny black frock with the silk facing showing soup spots, and a gray mustache yellowed by cigarette smoke? But for all that he's well up on the fond-uncle lines. I'd no sooner poked my head in the room than he jumps up prompt, dumps the ancient lid and the candy box on the sofa, and opens his arms.

"Ah, my dear Inez!" says he, and I had to block off an impetuous clinch by shoving him away with both hands.

"Wrong number," says I. "Say, take another look, and then tell me if I have any of the earmarks of a Petersen?"

"But—but, I was informed," he begins, "that—"

"Oh, she's here, all right," says I. "Inez'll be down in a minute. I'm just her friend, Trilby May Dodge. So you're her lost Uncle Nels, are you?"

"I have that honor," says he.

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"Now, that's putting it real polite, I'll say," says I.

"Not at all," says he. "Dear Inez always was my favorite niece, and I was not a bit surprised to learn that she had developed into a fascinating and talented young woman."

"Eh?" says I, staring at him. "Where do you get that dope?"

"Why," says he, "is it not true that—"

But just then Ruby sidles in from the front hall and starts wigwagging excited, with most of the whites of her eyes showing.

"Just a moment," says I, excusing myself, and slips out to see what has worked her up to such a state.

And I find her holding back a slim, neat dressed, pink-cheeked old party, with white hair and a red necktie.

"Well, Ruby," I whispers, "who's this?"

"He—he's Uncle Nels, too," stammers Ruby.

"Wha-a-a-at?" I asks, gaspy. "Another! Sure you haven't got it twisted? Here, let me talk to him. Who is it you're looking for, mister?"

"For my dear niece, Inez Petersen," says he. "Can it be that this is the little girl I used to—"

"Back up," says I. "It can't be anything of the kind. I wouldn't make more than half of Inez. You're her Uncle Nels, are you?"

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"I am," says he, "and I am most anxious to—"

"Naturally," I breaks in. "She'll be right down, too, and if you'll wait here for a minute I'll arrange for the reunion."

With that I slips into the front room, grabs entry No. 1 by the arm, and leads him into the back parlor.

"Sorry," says I, "but I'll have to shift you in here."

"Is my niece coming soon?" he asks.

"You bet," says I, "but there's such a rush of callers on to-night that— There's the bell again!"

I had just time to hustle No. 2 into the front parlor when I hears Ruby assuring a third party that this is where Miss Petersen lives, so I shuts the door and steps out where this poddy person with pop eyes and the prominent store teeth was waiting with a sad bunch of half-wilted roses in one hand and a dusty felt hat in the other.

"Can it be Uncle Nels?" says I.

"Inez!" says he, dramatic, as he reaches out to fold me in on the chip diamond pin which ornaments his shirt front. But by this time my footwork was getting good. I side-stepped him skillful.

"My, but you're easy pleased when it comes to nieces, aren't you?" says I. "Do I look like

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I was one hundred per cent Swede? Say, hold back the pent-up affections until you get the right dope. I'm Miss Dodge, and there are times when it's lucky for me that I can live up to my name."

"Pardon me, miss," says he, "but I was told that Inez Petersen—"

"That's right, too," says I. "How long have you been her uncle?"

"Why," says he, "I was—that is, I've been her uncle ever since she was born."

"That ought to qualify you for the part, then," says I. "Anyway, it gets you on the waiting list. Step inside, please."

"Waiting list?" says he. "I—I don't understand."

"Oh, it's all right," says I. "The front parlor isn't crowded yet, and Inez will be down to meet you presently. This way." And I shunted him in with the other old sport.

I had turned for a dash upstairs after Inez when Ruby lets in a fourth party, a spectacled young hick with a college band around his straw hat, no vest, and a soft collar. He couldn't have been a day over twenty-two.

"Now, come, buddy," says I, "don't tell me you're Miss Petersen's uncle."

"Oh, most decidedly no," says he, almost blushing. "Nothing of the sort."

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"Not even a cousin, eh?" says I. "Then what's the merry idea? Who and why?"

"Reporter," says he. "I understood that a Miss Petersen was to meet her long-lost uncle here to-night and—"

"You're a grand little guesser," says I, "although how you do it is past me. Yes, this is the spot, and the touching spectacle is to be pulled off right in here just as soon as I can—There, Ruby. See if that's another candidate."

It was. He's a round-faced, rather good-looking middle-aged gent, who holds a newspaper clipping in his hand.

"Pass him in with the others, Ruby," says I. "I've got to interview Inez and find out exactly how long on stray uncles she happens to be, for if there are many more we ought to rent a hall. Just line 'em up in there as they come."

And upstairs I burst in on Mrs. Marvin and Inez putting the finishing touches to an elaborate coiffure which made Inez look more than ever like a corn-fed goddess of liberty who had dropped the torch for the curling tongs.

"Is—is Uncle Nels there yet?" asks Inez.

"The returns aren't all in," says I, "but there's enough for a quorum, if that's what you want to know."

"Why, what do you mean?" demands Mrs. Marvin.

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"More or less what I said," says I. "Both parlors were filling up with lost uncles when I left. Inez, tell me something, How many brothers did your mother have in this or any other country?"

"She—she got only one," says Inez. "Except two who die in Sweden."

"We needn't count the dead ones," says I. "You're positive there was only one alive at the last census?"

Inez nods. "Only Uncle Nels," says she.

"Then there's something wrong somewhere," says I. "Four Uncle Nelses had been parked in the parlors when I came away, and it seemed as if the procession had just started."

"Four!" squeals Mrs. Marvin. "Why, how odd!"

"Yes, it's all of that," says I. "And if you don't mind my mentioning it, it's a little puzzling to know what to do."

"Why, that should be simple," says Mrs. Marvin. "Let Inez go down and pick out the right uncle."

"Think you could, Inez?" I asks.

"I—I dunno," says Inez. "I don't see Uncle Nels since I was little."

"And uncles are so shifty in their looks," says I, "especially those who drift off by themselves, get rich, and change their names. So it would be

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hard choosing, wouldn't it? The collection, so far, isn't an especially choice one, either. They're all very fond of you, though, Inez; I'll say that for them. They're the hug-on-sight kind."

"Yes-s-s?" says Inez, her eyes getting big.

We were still in the midst of the debate when a rap came at the door, and there was Miss Wellby, looking shocked and indignant.

"Will you please tell me, Miss Dodge," says she, "what all those strange men are doing in my parlors?"

"All?" says I. "How many did you count?"

"Nine or ten," says she. "Who are they?"

"Well," says I, "barring one or two reporters, most of them are Inez's lost uncles."

"But I—I don't understand," says she.

"Neither do we," says I. "They began to come about an hour ago, and the supply hasn't given out. Begins to look like a convention, doesn't it?"

"But it—it's absurd," says Miss Wellby. "Something must be done about it."

"Quite right," says I. "And as Inez seems to be suffering from shell shock, I suppose I'll have to be the goat. Let's all go down and have a look at the congregation."

I wasn't a bit cheered up, either, when we struck the lower hall, to see Ruby steering in a late arrival. He was a shabby little man with a

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long nose, and he, too, had a piece torn from a newspaper. That gave me my first hunch. I stepped in prompt and held out my hand.

"I'll take the clipping, please," says I.

"Oh, thanks," says he. "And may I see Miss Inez Peter—"

"Perhaps," says I. "Line's busy now. Push in and find a chair if you can."

"Why," says Mrs. Marvin, "I saw Barry Platt in there! It may be that he can tell us something."

"Wait!" says I. "This looks like a clue."

And I hadn't read more than a few lines from the newspaper piece before we all began to get an inkling—that is, all except Inez. The heading alone almost told the whole story. "Screen Favorite Searching For Rich Uncle." And then it went on to relate how the beautiful blond movie star, Miss Inez Petersen, who had recently been engaged as leading lady in the latest True Art production, had come all the way from her home in Duluth to hunt for a wealthy uncle who had disappeared from that city several years ago and was believed to be living in New York under an assumed name.

It's one of those human-interest yarns where plain facts are not allowed to interfere with any frills of fancy that might produce heart throbs. And at the end there's a paragraph which sug-

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gests that if Miss Petersen's Uncle Nels really is in town he ought to drop in at such a number West Fifty-seventh Street almost any evening soon, and soothe the fears of an anxious heart.

"Huh!" says I. "So you've been telling some reporter the story of your life, have you, Inez?"

"Me?" says Inez. "I don't see any reporters. Never. I tell Mrs. Marvin, that's all."

"Oh!" says I, turning to the friendly lady. "Then it was you?"

"Why," says she, "I—I may have mentioned something of the kind to Barry Platt. But he's such a nice boy I didn't think he would—"

"Evidently he has," says I. "And he's some press agent, if you ask me. Of course, I don't doubt that he meant all right. He couldn't guess that New York was full of volunteer uncles for lovely movie actresses. I wouldn't have, either. But that seems to be the case. There are enough for a couple of jury panels, and this paper hasn't been on the street but a few hours."

"Just suppose, though," puts in Mrs. Marvin, "that one of them should be her real uncle who had read that story and come to find her."

"Yes," says I. "There's that chance."

"How you find out?" demands Inez, who has been peering through the door.

"Whatever you do," says Miss Wellby, "I trust you will not be long about it."

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"I'll make it as snappy as I can, never fear," says I. "Now, let's see; what's the acid test for a genuine uncle? Ah, I think I have it! Here, Inez, a word on the side with you. Yes, back here in the corner. And whisper the answer in my ear."

She did it. Then I borrowed a writing pad and some pencils from Miss Wellby, took Inez by the hand, and marched into the front parlor. I suppose I should have been scared stiff, but I wasn't. As perhaps you have noticed I don't get fussed very easy. I stood there with my chin out and asked the delegates in the back room to move up.

"That's right," says I. "It's a bit crowded, but perhaps we sha'n't keep you long. To begin with, will all of you who are not Miss Petersen's uncle, please group yourselves in front of the mantelpiece? Thank you. Thank you. Three, four, five. All reporters, I take it?"

"Not me," says the shabby little man with the long nose. "I represent the Watchful Eye Detective Agency and I'd like a word with—"

"You're excused," says I. "Call to-morrow about noon. Now for the uncles. Here, gentlemen, is Miss Inez Petersen. She isn't a movie star any more. In fact, she had only a two days' trial at it and was fired. At present she has no job of any kind and a very low cash reserve. So you see she could use a rich uncle now—and he needn't be so scandalously rich at that."

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There was a little shuffling of feet in the back rows about then, but I held up my hand. "Don't anybody leave yet," says I, "for Inez is anxious not to miss any real uncles that may happen to be present. True, she has only one Uncle Nels, so some of you must be trying to horn in. But I think we can sift out the genuine, dyed-in-the-wool article. Barry Platt, will you help untangle this mess you've got us into? Then pass around these slips of paper and borrow the tall gentleman's silk hat. Are you all set? Everybody got his ballot? Then write the name of your dear sister, who was Miss Petersen's mother. Yes, that's all. Her maiden name. And I may say that any uncle who can't remember his own sister's name Miss Petersen hasn't any use for. Oh, come! Don't scratch your heads and chew those pencils that way. Or if you want to withdraw your entry simply drop your blank ballot in the hat and pass out. Ruby, have the front door open."

It was the pink-cheeked old boy with the red necktie who started the parade, and after that they crowded on his heels as fast as if they were taking part in a fire drill and were not sure they didn't smell smoke. Inside of two minutes not a candidate was left, and the group of reporters were standing there wearing broad grins.

"Sorry, buddies," says I, "but the Petersen

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family reunion seems to have been called off. Better luck next time."

But say, what those fresh young hicks can't think up to put in the papers! I didn't mind what they said about my carroty hair, or the freckles; but that part about my having Portia acting like a tongue-tied old maid who'd just had her tonsils out—that was almost personal.

Chapter VII

A Window Hound on the Trail

IT took Inez a couple of days to really get the full effect of this sudden rush of fake uncles, and even then she don't seem to be quite sure as to just what has happened. Chiefly she is impressed by the fact that all those fresh reporters, who had horned in on follow-up tips after Barry Platt had printed that first article about Inez and her hunt for a rich uncle, had gone off and written a lot of flip stuff about us. She has cut out all the pieces and has read them over and over, finally putting them carefully away in the fancy sweet-grass basket where she keeps her near-turquoise beads and her spare lingerie pins.

"We—we get our name in the papers. Hey?" she observes.

"Absolutely," says I. "Made the front page in two morning editions and earned an editorial squib in one of the evening sheets. What of it?"

"Kinda swell, eh?" says Inez.

"If you want to take it that way," says I. "As for me, I'm not so sure. I feel as though I'd

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been kidded before a big crowd. Still, I can stand that. If New York can't find anything better to laugh at than two honest working goils like us, let 'em go to it. I got a few grins out of that affair myself."

Inez makes a try at sorting out these mixed sentiments, but gives it up. "By Duluth," says she, "they don't do that."

"We had no such active press agent as this Platt person in Duluth," says I, "and you hadn't started looking for your Uncle Nels."

"Maybe he come yet," says Inez, letting down about a yard of wheat-colored hair over a set of shoulders that would have a marble Venus looking like an Art League copy done in brick clay.

"I doubt it," says I. "You're almost as much of an optimist, Inez, as a cellarless sport who goes out and buys a new cocktail shaker on a rumor that Milwaukee has elected a wet city council; but more than ever I mistrust that your Uncle Nels is not among those present."

"You—you mean he don't live any more?" she asks.

"I wouldn't put it as tragic as that," says I. "Isn't more than fifty or so, is he? And those retired lumberjacks are apt to be tough old boys. So he may be knocking around somewhere on the map. But not in New York. If he was,

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wouldn't he have heard how you were searching for him, with all the free advertising you've had? And he's had three or four days to show up in, with not so much as a post card from him. Or else, when he cut loose from the Petersen family eight or ten years back, he meant it to be a final break, and is sticking to his vow. What did you folks ever do to Uncle Nels that would cause him to work up a chronic grouch?"

Inez shrugs the alabaster shoulders. "I dunno," says she. "He get rich, we stay poor, and he don't come round any more."

"Sad, but human," says I. "Anyway, there you have it. He has been as thoroughly paged as if you'd gone through every street shouting for him with a megaphone. And the net result was a lot of old frauds who shuffled out foolish when I put them to the acid test. So it looks as if he wasn't here. Might have gone back to Sweden and bought his way into the dried-fish and safety-match aristocracy. Maybe he's Count Tandsticktor by this time. Or he may be utterly and totally deceased. You'd look well in black, Inez, if you would care to let your grief carry you that far."

"If Uncle Nels dies I should hear," says Inez, decided.

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "His may not have been a noisy finish. Some uncles expire

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quietly and with very little fuss. What you mean, I suppose, is that he would have sent word about it. They don't always do that, either. They get careless. And then, it's apt to be a busy time for them."

Inez gives me a wooden stare, indicating that she's lost the thread and is simply waiting until I get to talking rational again.

"Never mind," says I. "You may be perfectly right not to give him up, and if it's going to help you any to be able to mention casually that you have a rich uncle kicking around somewhere, why keep right on. Only, Inez dear, let's not feed the tale to any more cub reporters. I'm afraid Barry Platt has strained his imagination on us already. Besides, getting into the public prints that way makes us so conspicuous. Haven't you noticed how all the boarders stare when we come into the dining room?"

"I no care for that," says Inez, lifting her broad chin.

"Don't tell me you've swallowed the publicity bug, Inez," says I. "At least, I hope you'll stop short of subscribing to a clipping bureau or wanting to distribute photos with your name written across the bust and right shoulder. Personally, I'm strong for a quiet, unreported career, with as much privacy as one can get in a boarding house."

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But I could see that Inez wasn't with me. It had been only a few short weeks since we had slipped into town about as gawpy and verdant, from the Manhattan point of view, as any pair from north of Chicago well could be. But we'd been moving along some. We had served as orangeade dippers in an upper Broadway sidewalk booth, then we had broken into the movie business for a brief whirl, and then had come this uncle plebiscite with all the newspaper notices. And Inez would never be the same girl again. She had stood in the white light that beats upon a throne, as it were, and while she didn't quite know what it was all about, she rather liked it. She was going to want more of the same and I couldn't see how I was to get it for her.

Not until I had this talk with Mr. Campbell, the linen expert from the department store. You see, since the other night, everybody at Miss Wellby's has taken to speaking to us, as if we were sort of public characters that they didn't need an introduction to. Even this grouchy Scotchman with the game leg and the bald head.

"If you should be wanting a temporary seetuation, Miss Dodge," says he, "I have something in mind."

"How sweet of you, Mr. Campbell!" says I. "Unload it, will you?"

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And he tells me how a personal friend of his, Mr. McIntosh, in charge of the house furnishings, is going to need two young ladies to demonstrate an electric washing machine for a couple of weeks.

"Oh!" says I. "In some secluded spot in the subbasement, eh?"

"I believe it is to take place in a show window," says he.

"Say, that listens something like," says I. "Of course, what I don't know about electric washers is monumental, but I expect I could learn the patter. Or is this to be entirely pantomime?"

He explains that the show window opens into a main inside aisle and that at least one of us would have to do considerable talking, as well as take orders. The other could work the machine.

"Me for the speaking part," says I, "and Inez in spotless white would be perfectly stunning as a lady laundress. Tell your rainy-day friend not to put in that want ad. until he's seen us. We'll be down first thing in the morning."

We were, too. And I sure gave Mackintosh a classy line of conversation as a sample. "If there's any one thing I could be real eloquent about, Mr. Mackintosh," says I, "it's a back-saver like this. Why, say, I used to beat the sun up by an hour every Monday morning when I was living out near Tamarack Junction, Min-

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nesota, just so I could get steam up in the old iron kettle, and by breakfast time I'd be rubbing away on the zinc board like I was training to win the gold sculls in an international rowing regatta. Only ten in the Dodge family, and before noon I'd be a wreck, but there on the line would be hanging the short and simple flannels of the poor, every last piece. And believe me, if some bright angel had dropped down bringing one of these copper-and-glass contrivances which only calls for you to turn the button and look pleasant, I wouldn't have worried about my chances of getting through the pearly gates. Say, I could go hoarse telling what a boon to womankind this machine is."

"Huh!" says he. "You'll have a chance, Miss Dodge. Here's the booklet that tells all about it. When can you go on?"

"To-morrow," says I. "I'm a quick study, and all Inez has to do is shed her gum."

Did you see us, I wonder? I only ask because it almost seemed as though everybody in the world had their noses against the plate glass those first few days. From 9 A.M. until closing time in the afternoon they crowded in and out, most of them stopping at first for a glimpse over the heads of the others, and then boring in madly until they made the front row. Half of them men and boys, too, that you wouldn't think would

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be vitally interested in how the family wash was done. But then, a free show is a free show, and few of us want to miss anything.

Also I suppose you seldom get a more imposing window demonstrator than Miss Inez Petersen. Few of her weight and inches, anyway; and in her freshly done-up booth uniform, with her yellow hair fixed in a new style by her friend, Mrs. Marvin, and that calm stare in her wide-set gray eyes, she looks like a blond goddess who'd strayed in from the Milky Way. And you should see the haughty, superior air she gets on as she shows 'em how, after the double oscillator has soused the suds in and around all the clothes, you throw a switch and let the centrifugal wringer do the rest. Say, no wonder the traffic cop had to keep the outer edges of the crowd moving along.

As for me, I was having the time of my life. I haven't had so good an excuse to air my vocabulary since I was born, and all they had to do to set me off was for some mildly interested party to step up and ask a question. "No, madam," I'd say, for instance, "there is absolutely no need for using injurious acids or doubtful washing powders with this wonderful machine. Any kind of plain laundry soap will do. Suction and oscillation removes every particle of dirt, and does it without the slightest harm to

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the flimsiest fabric. Throw in a heavy woolen blanket and a dainty lace handkerchief. They will both come out whiter than the driven snow. No rubbing, no scrubbing. Just think, ladies, with this installed in your laundry, you can do the week's washing and give a tea party at the same time. It puts the sun in Sunday and leaves you the mon in Monday. Pays for itself in six months, and earns dividends all the rest of the year. If you wish to join the army of emancipated women, just make a deposit and sign on the dotted line. Here's a blank, madam. Cashier at the left."

That was only one of my little gems. I had another on the trifling cost of operation, a third on simplicity and durability, but my high note I always struck when I spoke with kindly compassion of other makes, but pointed out the seven cardinal virtues which this wonder-working product of a master mind alone had combined in one perfect and inimitable whole. Honest, I'll bet I had the well-known remarks of Cicero at the grave of his friend Marc Antony sounding like the maiden speech of a boss plumber at his first Rotary banquet. After Mr. Mackintosh heard it once he hustles off to the manager's office, borrows a shorthand expert, and has her make a copy of it. I expect he'll be selling it as a serial to the *Saturday Evening Post*, next thing I know.

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Anyway, when I struck him for a ten-dollar raise at the end of the third day, he stood for it with only a few squirms.

That was the same afternoon I discovered this repeater who was watching Inez so close from a corner of the window. Of course there had been quite a lot of old sports and young hicks who had tried to get gay with Inez through the plate glass. One had even come back with a cardboard message buttoned under his coat, and stood up displaying an invite for her to go out to dinner with him when she got off. But trust Inez for putting a crimp in any such ambitions as that. She's a cold proposition with strangers, Inez is; just as hot-headed as a pink icicle. Once they get the full benefit of that placid, refrigerated stare of hers they go off and absorb a hot chocolate or two to get their temperature back to normal.

But this particular old boy with the washed-out gray eyes, the button nose, and the Baldwin-apple cheeks don't seem to get discouraged so easily. He's a sticker. I noticed him soon after luncheon, sizing her up over the shoulder of a fat lady who was holding up a little boy; and nearly an hour later, when I looks out again, he is still there.

He doesn't look like that kind, either. Surely he wasn't costumed for the part of a home

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wrecker. He's a kind of a dried-up little shrimp, with a faded mustache, hair long in the back, baggy trousers, coat sleeves down to his knuckles, and a sagging black necktie that showed a gold collar button. I'm no finicky man critic either, but a front collar button display is always enough to settle 'em with me. Somehow it seems almost immodest.

"Say, Inez," says I, "who's your constant admirer? The old boy at the left, who needs to take a hitch in his necktie and a reef in his sleeves?"

"Him?" says Inez, giving a careless glance. "I dunno."

"Well, he's some window hound, I'll say," says I. "He's been there more than an hour steady."

"Maybe—maybe his wife make him do the wash at home," suggests Inez, indulging in one of her rare chuckles.

"If that's the idea," says I, "he's having an awful mental struggle about giving up the price of a machine. There! He's edging out. Perhaps he's coming in to invest."

But he didn't, so I decided that he must have had a hunch we were kidding about him and had slipped away. Along toward five o'clock, though, I spotted him again, back at the same corner. And he is taking a long, close look at Inez.

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"You've got him vamped good and plenty, Inez," says I. "Theda Bara couldn't have done a more thorough job. But I think he might have blown himself to a shave and a hair cut while he was gone."

"Huh!" says Inez. "Lotta old fools run loose, eh?"

He has sense enough to get wise that we're talking about him, though, and once more he edges out, so by the time the closing gong rings and we've joined in the home-going rush I've forgotten all about him. And after wasting twenty minutes trying to find seats on a No. 5 bus, we start out to walk home. Not that I mind strolling up Fifth Avenue, as a rule, but when you've been on your feet for an eight-hour stretch sitting would come rather easy.

It wasn't until we'd made the turn into Fifty-seventh Street, and were crossing Sixth Avenue, that I happens to look over my shoulder and notices a familiar figure.

"Will you look what's trailing us, Inez?" says I. "The wicked old cut-up! Your window hound!"

"Same one," says Inez. "But he's looking at other things."

"Yes, millinery," says I. "A minute ago, though, he was sleuthing after us."

"Maybe he just happen here," says Inez. "Come on; I'm hungry."

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"Very well," says I. "Might be just a coincidence, but if it gets to be a habit with him he'll have to talk to me."

I was just suspicious enough to keep scouting over my shoulder now and then, and before we had passed Carnegie Hall I got a glimpse of him hurrying along after us, stretching his neck as he went.

"Inez," says I, "are you especially fond of that old boy with the button nose and the saggy tie?"

"Me?" says she. "That old boob?"

"Noble sentiments!" says I. "Then duck into this doorway and let's see what happens. You won't be much late for dinner. Anyway, we don't want any more near scandals at the boarding house."

And a minute or so later along he comes, dodging through the sidewalk traffic and looking ahead, worried. I steps out bold and gives him the sign. He seems surprised and fussed, but he comes to a halt.

"Say, old sport," says I, "what's the dastardly design?"

"Hey?" says he.

"Is this a game of cross tag, or what?" I goes on. "Oh, you needn't rub your chin and try to look innocent! I watched you doing your window-hound act, and you've been trailing us clear from the store. Whaddye mean by it?"

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"I—I yust been walkin' along," says he.

"Yes, you have!" says I. "You've been following as close on our heels as you dared, and a moment ago, when you thought you'd lost us, you were sprinting ahead for all you were worth. Ought to be ashamed of yourself, too, at your age. Say, do you think you can drift in here from the rutabaga fields and pull stuff like that?"

I must say, though, that he's a nervy one. He blinks a bit nervous, but he stands his ground. "Excoose me, young lady," says he. "I—I don't mean nothing."

"That's a poor alibi," says I. "And if this is just a habit of yours I'm here to tell you that it's bound to pull down trouble. Now you tell me what your game is, or I'll call a cop."

That gives him a jolt, all right. "Please," says he, "I yust like to know about the other young lady, the big one."

"Yes, I could guess that much," says I. "They generally do. But why do you want information about her?"

"She—she looks a lot like somebody I know once," says he.

"Oh, does she?" says I. "Well, who was it in the dear dead past? Give us the name."

"Helma Olsen," says he, prompt.

And at that I heard kind of a choky gurgle from Inez.

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"Eh?" says I, turning to her. "What's the matter? Anyone you were acquainted with?"

"Helma Olsen," repeats Inez. "That—that maw's name when she ain't married."

"I knew, I knew!" cackles the old boy. "You must be little Inez."

"Well, well!" says I. "We seem to be getting somewhere, don't we? Now, what was this Helma Olsen to you, mister?"

"Helma my sister," says he.

"Glory be!" says I. "The real, genuine, sure-enough Uncle Nels at last! Do you get that, Inez?"

Inez nods. But she doesn't display much enthusiasm. She seldom does, though. The Petersen family evidently isn't given to impetuous clinches.

"Hello, Uncle Nels!" says Inez.

"Hello, Inez!" says he.

And they don't even shake hands.

"We—we been lookin' for you," adds Inez.

"I should say we had," I puts in. "Say, don't you ever read the papers?"

"Not much," says he. "What you want to find me for?"

"For the love of beans, listen to that!" says I. "Say, why shouldn't Inez want to look for her rich uncle?"

"Rich!" says he. "Who tell you that?"

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"Why, that was the general rumor," says I. "You understood that he was rich, didn't you, Inez?"

She nods. "Maw say so, and paw say so," says she.

"Foolish talk!" says the old boy. "Me rich!"

"He don't look rich to me," says Inez, "and we—we get late for dinner."

You can always bank on Inez to come out flat-footed with the crude but accurate facts in the case.

"Peoples say a lot that ain't so," mutters Uncle Nels, indignant. "Rich! Huh!"

"Oh, I guess you needn't make an affidavit," says I. "We'll take your word for it. Well, anything else?"

"What you do? Where you stay?" demands Uncle Nels.

"Say," I breaks in, "suppose you walk along with us and see. It's only a few blocks from here, and on the way over I can sketch out the whole tale. You'd be all night getting it from Inez. You see, I'm Trilby May Dodge, and I've known Inez ever since she left home. In fact, I was quitting my family at the same time."

Uncle Nels listens to the details of how we worked in Coleraine and Duluth, and finally came to New York to hunt for him. He grunts now and then, but that's all.

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"And now, what about you?" says I. "Where have you been hiding all these years, and what happened to that pile you were said to have made in the lumber business?"

"Bah!" says he. "I don't make much. Somebody tells lies. I yust live around. This your place, hey?"

"This is our mansion," says I. "It's Miss Wellby's boarding house, in case you should forget the number."

"I don't forget," says he. "I come see Inez some time. Good-by."

"Good-by," says Inez.

And almost before I knew it the reunion was all over. Somehow, for an event that we'd been looking forward to for so long, it had turned out to be mighty tame and inadequate. Not until we were halfway up the brownstone steps did it strike me that it was a singularly one-sided affair.

"See here, Inez," says I, "you don't know his name, even now, do you?"

"No," says she. "He no say."

"Nor where he lives, eh?" says I.

Inez hunches her shoulders.

"Something funny about all that," says I. "He's a cagey old boy, I'll say. And wouldn't it be a joke on us if, after all— Look, Inez; you chase in and get your dinner. I'll be along after awhile."

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"Where you go?" asks Inez.

"I mean to trail Uncle Nels," says I. "He hasn't any monopoly of this sleuthing business, has he? And I'm just as curious as the next one."

So off I dashed, picking up Uncle Nels in the distance before he'd crossed Broadway. I found it was quite a trick to keep a person in sight during the rush hour, but, as he seemed to have no suspicion that he was being followed, there was no need for me to stay very far behind. I stayed with him to the finish, too, and at that it wasn't more than forty-five minutes before I was back at Miss Wellby's, arriving just in time to rescue my dessert from Inez.

"Say," says I, breathless, "where do you suppose that poor old uncle of yours hangs out?"

"I dunno," says Inez.

"Well, I'll tell you," says I. "He lives in one of the swellest apartment hotels on Park Avenue."

"Janitor?" asks Inez.

"That was my first hunch," says I, "but it was all wrong. I watched him walk right in the front door, collect his mail, and take the elevator. Besides, the phone operator told me who he was. He's Mr. Nelson Swazey, and he lives in a five-room apartment on the seventh floor. Has a valet and his own private car and chauffeur.

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What do you know about that? That's your uncle Nels, for you!"

Inez finishes her rice pudding, thoughtful. "Then—then he is rich, hey?" she asks.

"Barring his afternoon street costume," says I, "he has all the symptoms. A bit odd in his ways, I should judge, but I'll bet when he signs his name to a check it can be swapped for real money at the bank. Yes, I should call him a rich uncle."

Inez sighs sort of satisfied and shows her cheek dimples. "Swell, eh?" says she.

"That depends," says I. "If you merely want him to talk about it, it is. Beyond that—well, we'll have to wait and see. I shouldn't chuck the window job just yet, though, if I was you."

Chapter VIII

Trilby Calls In a Friend

GIVE Inez three or four days to chew over a proposition, and she'll generally come through with some appropriate remark. She had about gone the limit when she surprises me with this one, just as we're tackling our prune-whip dessert at Miss Wellby's.

"Why Uncle Nels no come around, eh?" she asks.

"How should I know?" says I. "He's your uncle, not mine. What's your guess?"

"Maybe," says Inez, thoughtfully, reaching for a piece of layer cake I had neglected—"maybe he forget where we live."

"Not that old bird," says I. "Those washed-out blue eyes of his may not seem very active, but they take in a lot. I was watching 'em while he was with us the other day and they were busy every second. I'll bet he didn't miss a detail about either of us, Inez, from your new strap pumps to the batik freckle design across my nose. Besides, I saw him jot down the street number

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on the back of an envelope. Oh, he's got us placed, all right!"

"What's the good, then, having rich uncle?" demands Inez.

"Say, ditch that Edison questionnaire stuff, will you?" says I. "I'm no ignorant college grad. But allow me to suggest, Inez, that you didn't know he was a plute uncle at the time. Not until I'd trailed him up and made a report. And you didn't treat him as one, either. So he might have been peeved. Anyway, he's a queer old boy, and there's no telling what he'll do, if anything. Weren't figuring on cashing in on him so quick, were you?"

Inez shakes her head. "But people ask if I find him yet?" says she.

"I know," says I. "The general impression among the boarders, since that squad of false alarms showed up, seems to be that we invented this rich-uncle tale just to make ourselves popular."

"Hey?" says Inez, staring at me.

"They think we faked an Uncle Nels," says I. "It's natural enough. You'd talked a lot about him, and then all that is printed in the papers, and still no uncle appears. Here comes that young reporter person, now—Barry Platt, who gave you the free advertising. Let's see if he springs it."

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Oh yes, he did. All the opening I gave him as he drifted by was a roll of the eyes, and he promptly turns to camp down in an empty chair at our table.

"Well, how's the heiress getting along with her uncle hunt?" he asks.

"Tell him, Trilby May," urges Inez.

"Yes, do," says he.

"Wouldn't I be the simp if I did?" says I. "Say, Barry boy, do I look like a human bulletin board? And you know we haven't signed any contract to let you write us up in your paper once a week. So check out, old dear, check out!"

He's no hardened wretch, though, even if he is a bit careless about what he knocks off on his typewriter. I might have guessed that by the slick light hair and the mild eyes. He has a soothing, confidential way of talking to you, too.

"I'm sorry," says he. "But when a fellow is holding on to his job with his eyelids he's liable to grab anything. You see, I was trying to make good with the city editor, and that lost-uncle story of yours looked like sure fire hokum. It was, too. I was due to be let out last pay day, and they let me ride on the strength of it. That and the follow-up story about the nine volunteer uncles got me a good mark. Of course, it did put you in a hole for a while there, but you certainly handled the thing well."

"Think so?" says I.

"Brilliant dome work, I call it," says Barry. "That's what I told the other boys, and you saw what they said?"

"Oh yes," says I. "Especially that line about my having Portia looking like a tongue-tied old maid. Do you know, Barry, I'd just as soon omit being written up like that again?"

"No fear," says he. "Not unless you break out in an entirely new spot. I shot the Uncle Nels yarn for all it was worth. It would be old stuff now, and I was only asking about him—well, just to make talk. You thought him up, I suppose?"

"Thought who up?" I demands.

"Why, the rich uncle," says Barry.

"Thanks for the left-hander," says I, "but I did nothing of the kind. I haven't that sort of mind. Miss Petersen's Uncle Nels is just as much of a live one as you are."

"Really?" says he. "But—but you haven't got track of him, have you?"

"Not for publication, understand," says I.

"Oh, certainly!" says Barry.

"Then," says I, "Inez may let off some of the indignation she has bottled up. Your cue, Inez. Tell him about Uncle Nels."

"He did come, so there!" says Inez, lifting that Goddess of Liberty chin of hers. "Last Friday."

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"You don't say!" says Barry. "Why, I didn't hear about it."

"No, you wouldn't," says I. "He picked us up on the street and left us at the front steps. It wasn't what you printed that brought him, either. Never saw any of those pieces. He just spotted Inez in her window demonstration act, and she looked so much like his sister that he took a chance. He's the real thing. Rich, too."

"Perfectly bully, eh?" says Barry.

"Listens so, doesn't it?" says I. "But to be strictly candid, Barry, we're a bit doubtful that it means much. Uncle Nels has known where his favorite niece lives for nearly a week, and up to date he hasn't worn any holes in the front-door mat. Not even a ring on the phone from him. More than that, he's holding out on us. Uh-huh! Didn't even leave his name and number, and if I hadn't done a little quick sleuthing he'd have been just as much lost as before."

"Oh, I say!" says Barry. "Followed him, did you? That was clever. What does he look like?"

"That's the funny part," says I. "He gets himself up like he'd just blown in from Gopher Prairie. Regular rube outfit. If it's a disguise, he's an artist at that sort of thing; and if it isn't, why should he wear a hick regalia when he can

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afford to live in a Park Avenue apartment house, where the door man looks like a rear admiral dressed up to review the fleet? He's got me guessing, Uncle Nels has."

"We—we might ask him 'round, eh?" suggests Inez.

"And give away how I shadowed him?" says I. "That would get him suspicious of our motives. He'd be sure, then, that you had the net out for him. No, Inez, that's the last thing I should advise. Of course, I never had a rich uncle, myself; but if one should be wished on me I'm sure I shouldn't rush him off his feet."

"Quite right," says Barry. "It's his move now."

"Huh!" says Inez, pouty.

"Indicating," says I to Barry, "general dissent on the part of Miss Petersen."

He turns for a close look at her. I could have told him that was a risky thing to do, for somehow it's always the little fellows who fall hardest for Inez. Barry Platt doesn't seem to be blond proof. He stares and rubs his smooth chin.

"Well, who knows?" says he. "We may be wrong at that. I might be able to dope something out. Let's adjourn to the parlor."

"I gotta go get ready," says Inez. "Picture show."

"All right," says I. "I'll just stay and see if

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Barry has anything on his mind worth while, and you may bring down my hat."

"Stunning eyes, hasn't she?" says Barry, as we park ourselves on the old plush sofa.

"Rather placid," says I.

"Like a calm sea under a gray sky," he goes on.

"They're common enough in Minnesota," says I, "where the Petersens and Olsens are thick."

"I can't believe it," says he. "Wonderful eyes, I call them. And with that wheat-colored hair and her rose-leaf complexion—"

"There's such a lot of complexion, too," I breaks in. "But keep on. I'm simply crazy about hearing you rave over Inez's looks. So different from mine, eh?"

"Oh, well!" says Barry, pinking up in the ears a little. "You're a different type, you know."

"Yes," says I. "I suppose you don't care so much for gooseberry-green eyes? But don't they remind you of something? Ever see an old brick pit half full of water?"

He shakes his head, protesting. "No," says he, "but I've seen a piece of Chinese jade with the sun shining through, and a greenish opal that seemed to have a young bonfire inside of it."

"Nice boy!" says I. "And to think that he's wasting an imagination like that on mere newspaper work."

Barry Platt has a cute trick of dropping his

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chin and registering modesty. "If you don't mind my saying so, Trilby May," says he, "I'm getting to be rather partial to both of you."

"This is so abrupt, Barry," says I. "Still, if you think Miss Wellby wouldn't object to a little hand-holding in her front parlor—"

"Now you're kidding me," says he. "Not that I'm sensitive, but what I want to say is that I'm more or less grateful for the good turn you did me. That uncle story, you know. It was a job saver. And if there is any little thing I can do in return, I hope you'll let me know."

"Fair enough, Barry," says I. "Right now I don't figure how you can be especially useful, but later on I may give you a call. Ah! The fair Inez comes toting my one and only lid. Bong swar, Barrie. Don't dream of calm brick-yard pools under gray-green skies or anything like that. We're not twins, remember."

And we swapped friendly smiles. That's all. For as a vamp I'm sadly in need of practice. Oh, I can deal out a line of chatter that keeps 'em from nodding in their chairs; but five minutes afterward, as they sit in the gloaming, gazing up into the cigarette smoke, they don't see any lovely picture. If they do it hasn't carrot-red hair or my long flat lines. Nope. At least, I've never heard any rumors to that effect.

"How does he strike you, Inez?" I asks, as

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we make for Broadway and the glittering lights.
"Barry boy, I mean."

"Little feller," says Inez.

"Oh, I know," says I. "He doesn't stack up with Bill Hart or a lot of your full-dress-suit heroes of the screen; but he isn't exactly poisonous, is he?"

All I can get out of Inez, though, is a shoulder shrug. She simply can't see 'em unless they're at least six feet high or have a dark, cropped mustache. So why waste time telling her all the nice things he'd said about her eyes, and so on?

I wasn't planning on any campaign to work Barry in, either. Honest. What happened during the next few days just came naturally. It opened with our running across Uncle Nels again the next night. He was waiting in our block as we came home from the store. I caught sight of the faded, ragged mustache, and the Baldwin-apple cheeks, ten doors off, and nudged Inez.

"Look who's here again," says I.

"Uncle Nels!" says she, fluttery.

"Yes," says I, "but don't get emotional about it. Greet him casual and offhand, like you'd seen him every day for a year. And leave the rest to me. Hello! Dropped around, did you? Well, we're still doing the window trick, you see."

Uncle Nels nods to both of us and gives us the

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inventory size-up. "You—you get good pay for that?" he asks.

"Oh, it doesn't make us round-shouldered carrying it home Saturday nights," says I, "but it's enough to pacify the landlady."

He nods approving. "Girls should work," says he. "They don't get into mischief when they work."

"Then Inez and I are as safe as if we were locked in a convent," says I.

"You get good meals here?" he demands, nodding at Miss Wellby's front door.

"Oh, so-so," says I. "Not much danger of over-eating or of contracting gout, but if you're fond of goulash and liver pudding, one can get along."

Uncle Nels hesitates a minute, and then he comes out with a draggy invite. "You—you like to go to restaurant with me for—for supper?" says he. "I saw a place by the corner."

I'd seen it, too—six courses for seventy-five cents, glass-topped tables, and paper napkins. Also I'd noted the sloppy men waiters and the class of people who patronized the joint. So I didn't yearn for that kind of a blow. But just as I was framing up an alibi I got this sudden hunch.

"Couldn't think of sponging on you, Uncle Nels," says I. "Not just because you're a rela-

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tion of Inez. What's the matter with your joining us here as our guest? Let's see, this is boiled-beef-and-spinach night. How about it?"

"You—you want me?" he asks, feeling the stubble on his face. "I—I don't get shaved to-day."

"Oh, well, call it to-morrow night," says I, "and then we'll all have time to fix up. Here comes a young friend of ours—Mr. Barry Platt. I'm going to ask him to sit in, too, and we'll have a regular party of it. I say, Barry! Come and meet Miss Petersen's Uncle Nels, the one you've heard about."

"So pleased!" says Barry. "May I ask the name again?"

Uncle Nels scrapes his right foot nervous, but Barry is still gripping him by the hand and favoring him with one of his kiddish smiles, so he has to come across. "Swazey," says he, "Nelson Swazey," sounding the w as in vinegar.

"We're staging a little four-handed dinner party for to-morrow night, Barry," says I, "and we're counting you in. Is it all right?"

"Perfectly," says Barry. "In honor of Uncle Nels, eh? I'll be there. In fact, I'll do better than that. I'll stop for you, Mr. Swazey, and bring you around. Let's see, your number is—"

And before Uncle Nels can sidestep he has made him call it.

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"I—I gotta go now," says Uncle Nels.

"Remember," sings out Barry, cordial.
"About six-thirty to-morrow night."

There's nothing sluggish about Barry Platt's mental processes. I expect his newspaper work keeps him in high gear, but he surely did extract all the personal statistics from Uncle Nels smooth and easy. I could see that he was going to be a great help at the reunion.

"If I don't collect him he may renig," explains Barry. "Looks like a shifty old boy. Beg pardon, Miss Inez."

"I wish he get haircut," says Inez.

"He could stand a little barbering," admits Barry.

"And a card to a pressing club might give him a hint that they're not wearing 'em baggy this season," I puts in. "If we're going to exhibit a rich uncle, why not have one that looks the part?"

"Say, that's worth thinking over," says Barry.
"Leave it to me."

He's a great little plottter, Barry. Inside of an hour he comes hunting us up with a whole scenario developed.

"Look, Trilby May," says he, enthusiastic.
"Isn't the idea to give Uncle Nels a good time?"

"Absolutely," says I.

"Then why not make it a big night?" he goes

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on. "Why be boarding-house pikers? The old chap looks as though he'd never seen much life. Let's give him a peek. I'll go fifty-fifty on it. How about a cabaret roof dinner?"

"I'm game," says I, "but I can't see Uncle Nels in a crowd like that. Wouldn't he look like he'd been planted as part of a vaudeville act?"

"Not after I get through fixing him up," says Barry.

"Oh!" says I. "And what about us? How far do you want us to go in the costume line?"

"The limit," says Barry.

"Rash youth!" says I. "But then, I suppose you couldn't guess just how spiffy we can array ourselves if we take the pick of our wardrobe."

"The spiffier the better," says Barry. "My motto is, nothing's too good for a rich uncle. And believe me, he's going to look it. You see, my room mate's away for the week end, and he's a fancy dresser. Anyway, we're all set."

So it's lucky we'd planned this for Saturday, when we had that extra hour. And maybe you remember the two evening dresses we won when we got mixed up with the Junius Stokeses? Well, by five-thirty we were home and laying them out. Inez had spent her lunch hour and nearly two whole dollars having her hair done, and with the few little touches I was able to add with an eyebrow pencil and a rabbit's foot, I had her looking

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dazzling enough to crash in anywhere in the lobster district. Took me all of half an hour, though, to ease her into that black-net affair, after which I had her pin me into the pink one.

"Would anybody guess, Inez," says I, "that we demonstrated electric washers for our daily bread? I ask you, now?"

"We look swell, eh?" says she, trying to get a full-length view in the bureau mirror. "Maybe Uncle Nels gets surprised."

"If he doesn't," says I, "he's a human shock absorber. Anyway, the thought should come home to him that he has a niece who would be a credit to him if he ever decided to loosen up his grip on the check book for her benefit."

"Oh!" says Inez, her eyes widening. "That's why we do this, hey?"

"You didn't think it was all a case of family affection, did you?" says I. "You know, Inez, I suspect that your dear uncle is one of these nice old boys who would squeeze a nickel until the buffalo dripped blood. But he may have his soft side. That's Barry's notion, too, and he's a bright youth in some ways. Also, he's a plunger. But I do hope he succeeds in making Uncle Nels look less like a county commissioner who's just sold his standing timber. Not that I'm too proud to be seen with him at a roof garden, but I'd hate to divert all the attention from the cabaret

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show. Eh? Was that a knock at the door? Oh yes, Ruby! Tell the gentlemen we'll be right down."

And I'll never doubt Barry Platt's skill as an uncle persuader again. For there, on the edge of the plush sofa in the parlor, sits Uncle Neis in full evening regalia. True, he wears it somewhat as a woodshed might a tile roof, holding his neck away from the collar points like he was afraid of puncturing his windpipe, and with his watery blue eyes set in an agonized stare. But aside from that and the bulge in his pleated shirt bosom and the way his feet are toed in, he's a work of art.

"How did you ever do it?" I whispers to Barry, after the fond greetings are over.

"Took me most of the afternoon," says Barry, "and I had to borrow about all that my room mate had in his trunk. The old boy was inclined to be balky at first, but when I explained what classy dressers you and Inez were when you dined out, he finally gave in. And say, I didn't stretch the truth any, at that. My, but you two look stunning! Especially Inez. Why, she's a dream!"

"How sweet of you to put it that way," says I. "Oh, man! Even Uncle Nels. See, she's got him in a trance so soon."

It's a fact. He's just sitting there gawping at

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her, as fascinated as a rabbit watching a boa-constrictor.

"I believe it's working," I says to Barry on the side.

"Like a charm," says he. "But bring him out of it. I've got a taxi waiting, and they'll hold the table only until seven-thirty."

I don't know which gave a better imitation of a wax dummy—Uncle Nels in his first dress suit, or Inez making her debut at a roof garden. We couldn't get a syllable out of either of 'em. The only life-like motions they made was when food was put before them. They didn't miss any of that. I'll say they didn't. Of course, I rather expected Inez to nourish herself generously. That's her long suit, and she gallops jauntily through the whole program, from fruit cocktail to café parfait, with no skips and nothing left to scrape from the plates.

And Uncle Nels is right with her. How a dried-up little old shrimp like that could hold so much without even easing off a vest button, is a mystery we won't dwell on. But he made the grade just as easy as though he was built to wear a forty fat instead of a thirty-four slim. And after he's lighted up a long black cigar that Barry slips him when the demi-tasses were served, he consents to look at what's going on in the dancing space.

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Aren't they the bold pieces, some of those cabaret chorus Janes? And I suppose they're sure of getting a laugh when they pick out tall-stick delegates like Uncle Nels to get fresh with. It was bad enough when one henna-haired vamp costumed chiefly in purple tulle, danced up and tickled him under the chin with her feather fan, but when she finished her act by bouncing on his lap and giving him a bear hug I looked for him to crawl right under the table. He didn't, though. He just got on a simple smirk and acted as though some one had thrown a squash pie at him.

"Don't you think, Barry," says I, "that it's high time we took Uncle Nels home?"

"Decidedly," says Barry. "Just a moment, until I settle up."

And when the waiter produced what looked like a taxi bill for a whole township Uncle Nels made his first remark. "How—how much it cost, all this?" he asks.

Barry lets him have a peek at the staggering total.

"Huh!" says Uncle Nels, hunching his shoulders. "We better go."

During the ride uptown he seemed thoughtful, and when we dropped him at his number he don't waste any breath in saying what a nice time he's had. Nothing like that.

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"What I do with these?" he asks Barry, indicating the evening clothes.

"Oh, I'll drop around and get 'em to-morrow sometime," says Barry.

"Well!" says I, as we rolls on. "His gratitude is never going to make him hoarse, is it?"

"Never mind," says Barry, cheerful. "He's a deep thinker, I'll bet."

And not until about 2 P.M. Sunday afternoon did Barry know how right he was. It was half an hour after that when he came back to Miss Wellby's with the suitcase and borrowed clothes.

"How did you find Uncle Nels to-day?" I asked him.

Barry springs that crooked smile of his, and there's a queer look in his eyes. "I didn't find him at all," says he, "and I don't think you will again, right away."

"What?" says I. "You don't mean that he—"

"Vanished," says Barry. "Moved out early this morning and left no address."

"Nor any word?" says I.

"Oh, yes," says Barry, holding out an envelope. "This."

Inside was a single sheet of paper, with one line scribbled in lead pencil. I read it aloud:

"A niece like that would be too expensive. —Uncle Nels.' Gosh!" says I.

"Tough luck!" says Barry. "And we blew in

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twenty-four-fifty on that old tightwad! But it looked like a good hunch to me."

"Yes, so you said at the time," says I. "And I agreed with you. I'm afraid, though, Barry, that as uncle connoisseurs we're good judges of cheese. Twenty-four-fifty! That's over eight apiece we spent to lose what we've been so long finding. I don't know how I'm ever going to break the sad news to Inez."

"She's that fond of him, is she?" asks Barry.

"She's awfully fond of eight dollars," says I.

Chapter IX

Inez Knocks 'Em for a Gool

“GOOD news, Inez!” says I. “Give a guess.”

It's the poorest thing Inez does, trying to unscrew the inscrutable, but after a deep mental effort that almost breaks the rhythm of her gum chewing, she comes across with this:

“We—we have ice cream for dessert to-night?”

“What a vivid, not to say gastric, imagination you have, Inez!” says I. “Well, ice cream may be an item, but it doesn't tell the whole story. A perfectly nice young man is going to take us down to Greenwich Village for dinner, and a regular sightseeing spree.”

“Who?” demands Inez.

“Barry Platt,” says I.

“Huh!” says Inez.

“Such scorn!” says I. “But have a heart, Inez. He means well, you know, even if he did rather bug things with your Uncle Nels. But that roof-garden splurge of ours wasn't all Barry's

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fault. It looked like a good play to me at the time, and how were we to know that this rich relation of yours was a trick uncle? Besides, I expect this is Barry's way of making good for that break. And it ought to be sport."

"Is it out by Jersey, this village?" asks Inez.

"Distinctly not," says I. "Listen, Inez: Greenwich Village isn't out anywhere. It's the zippiest, wildest, wickedest part of New York, full of artists and poets and soul mates and short-haired girls and long-haired men. It's supposed to be the most picturesque and shocking spot west of Paris. Honest, haven't you heard about it?"

Inez hadn't. That is, if she had, the information hadn't penetrated.

"Then it's time you knew all about it," says I. "I've been crazy to see it, and I was thrilled to the bone when Barry asked me to-day if he couldn't take us down and show us around. Anyway, we need a little cheering up."

"Because I lose Uncle Nels again?" asks Inez.

"Partly," says I. "Makes you about ninety per cent orphan, doesn't it? And then the fact that our engagement as window demonstrators is going to peter out to-morrow is a bit discouraging. I had rather banked on our being sent to some other store, but it seems that summer is a closed season for electric washers, and we must turn our talents toward some other line. You'll like seeing

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Greenwich Village, I think. It's different from any part of town we've been in as yet, I understand. Anyway, a free dinner is a free dinner."

"Yes-s-s?" says Inez. "All right."

When she comes to checking enthusiasm her brakes hold well. If I had asked her to step out and watch the earthquake it would have been about the same, for Inez never forgets that she was born near Tamarack, Minnesota, and that she's Swede on both sides. And when you try to spring anything new on her she'll drop into that poised mood that makes a cement doorstep-lion seem frisky.

But Barry Platt, as he tows us out to the L station and gets us settled opposite him in a cross seat on a Sixth Avenue local, doesn't seem to notice any unusual reserve. No, Barry is at the stage when he's perfectly satisfied if he can sit and gaze into those placid gray eyes and watch the pink-and-white flush play around Inez's cheek dimples. All the way down he talked to Inez, and I did the answering, but I'll bet he gave her credit for most of the repartee.

"Tell me, Barry," says I, "where do we eat?"

"That depends," says Barry. "Do you insist on real food, or had you rather take a chance on an odd joint where the grub may be poor but the stage setting and the people rather interesting?"

"Oh, let's have the weird stuff and risk the

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nourishment," says I. "How about going to one of those places with queer names? What are some of them?"

"You mean the 'Pig and Whistle,' 'Three Steps Down,' 'Sonia's,' and 'The Pirates' Den?'" he asks. "Those are all queer enough, so far as the names go, but they're rather well known. Full of teachers from the summer schools, and Jersey commuters, and out-of-town buyers. I've heard of one or two new joints that might be worth trying. You see, the real Villagers shift around from place to place, and you never can tell, unless you live down there, just where they're apt to be. So we'll scout around a bit."

That's what we did. It's a messy section, this Greenwich Village, and picturesque in spots. Mostly the narrow, crooked streets, are full of boys playing tip-cat and handball, and the bulk of the buildings are just common tenement houses overrunning with a mixed lot of foreigners who swarm on the sidewalks and lean from windows and perch on iron fire escapes. But scattered here and there about the district are old houses that have been rebuilt into studio apartments, with dusty-looking flower boxes and discouraged privet and cedars in tubs. Also, about every fourth basement has been made into an eating place.

The general formula for creating a café out of

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a cellar seems to be to smear the whole front with some vivid color, like Greek blue, or willow green, or turkey red, hang odd draperies in the window, and stick out a crude sign lettered with some striking name, like "The Purple Pup," or "Stella's Kitchen."

Only one of 'em got a rise out of Inez, and this was a place where the entrance was guarded by a fierce-looking gent got up in a black wig, a bandanna around his head, big gold hoops in his ears, and a rusty cutlass dangling from his belt.

"Look!" whispers Inez, husky.

"Yes," says Barry. "'The Pirates' Den' and across the street is 'Mother Carey's,' where they had some wild doings last winter. But there's an alley around the corner where they say—Oh, here it is! 'The Mad Mullah.' Hasn't been running long, but I've heard it's rather unique. Let's give it a try."

"I—I no like," says Inez, grabbing me panicky by the hand and staring suspicious down this narrow, dark hole, littered with ash cans.

"Oh, come along," says I. "Barry will protect us. Won't you, Barry boy?"

"It's perfectly all right," says Barry. "See, there's a red light at the far end. That's where we go in, and after we pass the Mad Mullah we're safe. Let's see, I believe you're expected to hammer three times on the door."

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Barry had just finished pounding with his fist when the door was jerked open and this freak with the false whiskers and the huge green turban stood glaring at us savage.

"Rikky tikky tavvy, gazzoom!" says he, explosive.

"Alla il allah, kerzam!" says Barry. "Three pilgrims from the desert looking for food and drink."

"Enter pilgrims, but 'ware the curse of the Mad Mullah," says he, waving us in.

"What—what's he for?" asks Inez.

"Just local color," says Barry. "He's there so you won't notice how weak the soup is, or grouch about the chewy cold-storage chicken. And all this yellow cheesecloth hung' from the ceiling is supposed to make you think you're dining in a tent out on the desert. See the guns and spears on the walls? Quite Oriental, eh?"

"But I don't see any place to eat," I objects. "Where are the chairs and tables?"

"Oh, those would be too commonplace for a joint like this," says Barry. "Here's where we each collect a cushion and squat on the rugs, as if we were regular Arabs. That's the idea, Trilby May. Come on, Inez. Camp down with us."

She eases herself down as graceful as a baby elephant doing a trick, and then a tall female with henna-kissed hair and a lot of veils floating

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over her harem costume comes to serve the first course. As a regular meal I can't hand it much, but it was served in funny crockery bowls, and the bread looked like an overgrown pancake, and the muddy black coffee came in dinky little brass cups, so there was novelty if not nourishment. And as a finishing touch, the Mullah person lugged over something that looked like a young baseburner coal stove, and touched a match to it.

"The hookah—Turkish pipe," explains Barry, unwinding three flexible tubes and passing them around. "Have a few puffs?"

"I'll try anything once," says I.

"Pah!" says Inez, after one whiff. "No good."

At which Mr. Mullah, who'd been lingering near and had caught the remark, proceeds to improve on his act by letting on to be furious. "Dog of an unbeliever!" he yells. "Is it so thou would mock the sacred rites of hospitality? By Allah! but it shall not be!"

"Hey?" asks Inez.

"Smoke, daughter of the hated Giaour!" he tells her. "Smoke ere the curse of the Mad Mullah descends upon you!"

He's standing over her threatening, his dull eyes leering from his painted face, and a lean finger pointing to the pipe tube. Two girls who had come in with another party and were squatting on cushions near by, started giggling, and

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the henna-haired female coming in from the kitchen with a tray of food stops to grin.

"How foolish!" says Inez, waving him away.

"What!" shouts the Mullah. "Sacrilege in the tent! Smoke, woman! The Mad Mullah commands. Here!" And with that he jams the mouthpiece between her lips.

"Oh, I say now!" protests Barry.

"Silence, dog!" says the other. "Smoke she must."

He certainly did look fierce in the outlandish rig, and it was hard to tell whether he was just play acting or what. Almost any girl would have been scared stiff by that time. But not Inez. What she can't see she might be afraid of, but nothing else.

"You get fresh, eh?" says Inez. "Huh!"

And the next thing this Mullah party knows she has reached up, grabbed him by the neck, pulled him down across her knees, and is laying on the spansks like a cranky schoolma'am who's had her picture drawn on the blackboard. They weren't any love pats, either. Inez was brought up on a farm with four brothers and she knows just what to do when a male treats her rough. Also, she's been used to swinging a wood ax or a bean flail for hours at a stretch. And she sure made the dust fly from those red cotton bags Mr. Mullah was wearing for trousers.

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"Ouch! Wowey!" he screams, kicking and wriggling. "Stop her, Gwendolyn!"

But Gwendolyn, who seems to be the female with the revised hair, simply parks the tray on the floor and rocks back and forth with her hands on her hips and lets the chuckles flow free.

"Oh, Percey!" she gurgles. "You look too funny for words!"

"There!" says Inez, giving him one last whack to grow on. "I guess you no get fresh again right off."

At which she gives him a shove that sends him rolling across the rug almost into a dinner-party group that have been holding their breath as they watched.

"Why, Inez!" says I. "How impetuous!"

As for Barry Platt, he has watched this strong-arm exhibition without saying a word, but he acts sort of awed and thoughtful.

Naturally, the one who is most disturbed by this little outbreak of temperament is Percey, the Mad Mullah. Maybe he wasn't really mad before, but there's no doubt about it now. After he's picked himself up and felt to see if his bones are all whole, he stalks tragic over to Gwendolyn, who still shows signs of mirth.

"All right!" he growls at her. "Laugh your silly head off. But this ends it all. Understand?"

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"Why, whatever do you mean, Percey?" says she. "Ends what?"

"Everything between us," says he. "I've stood for a good deal from you, Gwendolyn, ever since you came between me and Birdie Collins. You queered an act that I'd always been able to book for big time in the best houses. That sketch of mine had been a knockout for two seasons until you horned in and took Birdie's place. After that—nothing but canceled contracts. And then you buffaloed me into this fool enterprise. Bah! It was bad enough having to eat left-over spaghetti three times a day and watching you behave kittenish with bald-headed old sports and young bank clerks. But when you ring in a female Dempsey and let her nearly kill me, that is the final touch. I'm through, Gwendolyn."

"Really?" says she. "Seems to me I've heard you say something like that before, Percey dear."

"Don't Percey-dear me," he snaps. "I'll show you."

And he tears off the green turban, slamming it on the floor and jumping on it, peevish. Next he sheds the spangled jacket, and as he throws that into a corner he dashes towards the back room.

"Inez," says I, "I'm afraid you've busted up the show."

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"I no care," says Inez.

"Still," says I, "perhaps we'd better register a word or two of sympathy with the lady manager. Eh, Barry?"

"Oh, I don't know," says Barry. "She doesn't seem to be much worried. Perhaps Percey is only pulling an old bluff."

"If he is," says I, "he's making it thorough. See?"

For here comes the ex-Mullah carrying a battered kit bag with the end of a necktie and part of a collar sticking from one corner. He has washed off most of the make-up and has made a quick change to citizen's clothes.

"Percey!" gasps Gwendolyn. "Where—where are you going?"

"To find Birdie," says he. "I know where she is, too, and inside of ten days we'll be booking our old sketch on the summer circuit."

"Good Gawd!" wails Gwendolyn, slumping on the rug as the door slams behind him.

Well, of course we couldn't just breeze out and leave her like that. Besides, Barry hadn't settled his bill. We helped her into a corner, Barry and I, propped her up with cushions, and offered all the soothing words that came to us.

"Awfully sorry," says I, "but Inez didn't mean to be quite so rough with him. She doesn't realize her strength, you see, and I had no idea she

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was going to cut loose or I would have stopped her. Maybe he'll come back by morning."

"No, he'll not," moans Gwendolyn. "Not if that Birdie woman gets hold of him. And we were doing so well here! Oh, oh!"

"But there are a lot of vaudeville artists knocking around Times Square," suggests Barry. "I can round up a dozen for you any day."

"Not one like Percey Pollock," insists Gwendolyn. "He—he was such a help. Why, he would even wipe dishes after hours. And now he—he's gone—forever. I'll just have to close up, that's all."

"Tough luck," says Barry. "If there's anything we can do—"

"Wait!" says Gwendolyn, suddenly sitting up and wiping her eyes. "Who is that superb creature who gave Percey what was coming to him so thoroughly?"

"That's my friend, Miss Inez Petersen," says I.

"But who are you?" demands Gwendolyn. "What do you do?"

"Us?" says I. "Oh, we're a versatile pair. We do almost anything from dealing 'em off the arm in quick lunch joints to acting in the movies."

"But now?" she insists.

"To tell the truth," says I, "we're strictly at liberty just now; at least, we will be after tomorrow. Why?"

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"Let me look at your Inez," says Gwendolyn.

"Come, Inez," says I, beckoning her over.
"This is Miss—er—"

"Mrs. Tremaine," says Gwendolyn, getting on her feet and shaking hands. "What a glorious physique you have, my dear! Such exquisite coloring! Such poise! Such glorious eyes and hair! A pink-and-white goddess. That's it! Oh, I've found it! The white goddess!"

"Hey?" says Inez.

"That is what you shall be. Here!" says Gwendolyn, waving her arms enthusiastic. "Will you come, dearie?"

"I dunno," says Inez. "What you want?"

"I want you to come and be the presiding genius in the 'Cave of the White Goddess,'" says Gwendolyn. "In two days I can do it. Yes, I've felt all along that the Mad Mullah was playing out. It only brought the women. And women aren't spenders or tippers. What we want is to get the men coming. And the White Goddess will do it. They'll go wild over you. Absolutely. Listen, Inez dear; I shall change this place into a white-and-gold room. A little paint and a few yards of muslin will do it. At one end will be a white-and-gold throne. There you shall sit, crowned and glorious, reigning over the banquet. It will knock 'em cold. Will you do it, dearie?"

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Inez stares at her a minute. "What I have to do?" she asks.

"Nothing but look beautiful and make change," says Gwendolyn. "From six until eleven-thirty. You will, won't you?"

"Trilby May, too?" demands Inez.

"Who?" asks Gwendolyn.

"That's me," says I. "And I doubt if you can get Inez unless you work us in as a team. I don't just see, though, how I would fit in."

"Quite simple," says she. "As a lady in waiting."

"Oh!" says I. "On the tables? Well, I can do that. What do you say, Inez—shall we give it a whirl?"

"How much?" says Inez.

"Oh, we will arrange that satisfactorily," says Gwendolyn. "Suppose we say twenty apiece to start with, and then a ten-per-cent bonus on all receipts over a certain amount. I always believe in sharing profits with my co-workers. And this is bound to go big. Shall we call it settled?"

Inez looks at me inquiring. "It's a whiz," says I. "Goddessing is Inez's long suit, and my life work seems to be to give her what she wants. We'll show up Monday afternoon, shall we?"

"About five-thirty," says Gwendolyn. "I

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hope to have the place ready by then, and that will give us time for a little rehearsing. Good-by, Inez. Percey Pollock can go hang."

And so, hardly an hour after we had wandered into this Greenwich Village joint as strangers, we walked out as near partners.

"Which is what I call rather shifty work," says Barry. "Say, do you think you're going to like it down here?"

"We've tackled a lot of things that looked worse," says I. "Anyway, now that Inez's rich uncle has faded into the background more hopelessly than ever, we've got to do something. Besides, we should worry. It's Gwendolyn that's got to do the hustling. Three days! I doubt if she can make the grade."

But I didn't know Gwendolyn. When we reports down there Monday afternoon I could hardly find the place, it was so changed. The alley had been cleaned up, the brick walls white-washed, and out at the entrance was a new sign announcing "The Cave of the White Goddess." Inside were a lot of white tables and gilt chairs, with white hangings as a background, and at the right of the door as you came in was this throne affair. Course, it's nothing more than a foot-high platform with a sort of black velvet canopy and side curtains to it, and a heavy, high-backed old chair that has been treated to a

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coat of black enamel. But the effect is more or less striking.

"Well, how does it all hit you?" asks Gwendolyn.

"Square between the eyes," says I. "Say, you're some grand little transformer, aren't you? You must have had half a dozen men working here."

"Men!" says Gwendolyn. "I should say not. Only a carpenter for half a day. The rest I did myself with the help of two Michigan girls who are studying interior decorating. I gave them a lesson that lasted eighteen hours, and didn't charge them a cent. Now to dress Inez as the White Goddess. I picked up a perfectly corking costume at a theatrical wardrobe sale. Let's see how it fits."

It's a white satin affair, heavy with imitation pearls and a girdle of white silk rope thick enough to tie a mule with. There's plenty of train to it but no sleeves to speak of; mighty little back, and a sketchy front. Gwendolyn's idea of goddesses seems to be that they should dress mostly from the waist down, with a slit skirt, at that.

"Gosh!" says I, when we'd shoehorned Inez into it. "I hope there's some way of anchoring those shoulder straps in place."

There was. Gwendolyn did it with strips of surgeon's tape, and after she'd draped a few

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yards of white tulle around Inez's shoulders the exhibit wasn't quite so startling.

"Now we'll see how you look on your throne," says Gwendolyn. "You take her train, Trilby May. There!"

Maybe you can imagine the effect—Inez draped in white satin and pearls, her white shoulders and arms glimmering through the white tulle, and sitting in that black chair with the black velvet hangings behind and around her.

"Isn't she a real goddess?" demands Gwendolyn.

"Uh-huh," says I. "That is, if you don't mind a goddess with the gum habit."

"Oh, of course she mustn't do that, not during business hours," says Gwendolyn. "But I ask you, Trilby May, if she isn't a picture?"

"A regular circus tableau," says I. "Say, with her posed up there not a man in the place will know whether he's eating soup or salad. I guess you've picked a winner this time, Mrs. Tremaine."

"I'm sure of it," says Gwendolyn. "Within forty-eight hours the fame of the 'White Goddess' should spread from one end of the Village to the other."

She knew what she was talking about. From a dozen dinner customers who dropped in that first night just out of curiosity, our trade jumped

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to forty-odd the next evening, and by Thursday we had 'em standing in line clear out into the alley, waiting for tables. As you might know, Barry Platt was among those who came early and hung around late.

"Well, Barry," says I, over his shoulder, as I'm serving him with a demi-tasse, "are you getting an eyeful?"

"Yes," says he. "And I wish I had sense enough to let it ride at that."

"Can it be," says I, "that you're remembering what happened to Percey?"

Barry shivers as though I'd dropped a chunk of ice down the back of his neck. "Let's not talk about it," says he.

So we didn't. He is a nice boy, Barry Platt. But he has two left eyes.

Chapter X

What Inez Missed Out On

I DON'T know how long this moon-faced person with the fresh coat of sunburn on his bald head had been trying to give me the friendly eye. For, with Mrs. Tremaine subbing in the kitchen for a cook who was enjoying an ulcerated tooth, and me trying to wait on six tables all by my lonesome, you can guess how much spare time I had to waste on a middle-aged cut-up who thought that so long as he was dining in Greenwich Village it was up to him to get gay.

But finally, along toward eight-thirty, when the big rush had sort of eased off, I did take his signal and drift over to the corner table where he was finishing his demi-tasse. One of these poddy, short-legged, barrel-waisted men, he is, with soft chubby fingers and a chin dimple. And somehow I am always suspicious of the chin-dimpled male. Not that he's apt to be any professional home wrecker, or anything like that, but generally he has a mushy, sentimental streak in him that shows sooner or later.

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Even if it hadn't been for the time table and the home paper sticking from his coat pocket, I could have guessed he was an out-of-town tripper. For one thing, his hair was cut round in the back, coal heaver's style; and then he wore three different lodge emblems—elk's head in his buttonhole, gold square and compass as a stickpin, and a Shriner's fob on his watch chain—small-town stuff that you can't go wrong on. Besides, when he first came in he'd almost started to take off his coat and hang it up, but had remembered that he was away from home, just in time.

"More coffee, sir?" I asked.

"Sakes no!" says he. "Another cup of that and I wouldn't get to sleep until after midnight. Don't tempt me, girlie."

"Trust me, mister," says I. "Tempting isn't my line. Here's your check."

"Aw, say!" says he. "Don't go off mad. I'm not trying to kidnap you, girlie."

"That's comforting," says I. "What's the folksy idea, then?"

"Just lonesome, that's all," says he. "Seems funny to you, I expect, but this is such a whaling big town, and there's so many people you don't know, that after you've knocked around in it a couple of days you begin to feel blue and homesick. But I suppose you were born and brought up here?"

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I shut my eyes and indulged in a sketchy smile. Say, it doesn't take long to put on the New York finish, does it? Probably this snappy waitress costume with the short white smock effect, and white silk hose with the black clocks, helped some. And then the box cut on my carroty hair. Oh, sure! Gwendolyn had wished that on me the first day. It did get a gasp out of Inez, but once I got used to going without hairpins and found how easy it was to coax a curl into the ends of my rusty mop, I was glad I'd had the nerve to do it. And it does give rather a pert, zippy look that I'd lacked before.

I wondered what he'd say if he'd known how few months it had been since I left Superior Street, Duluth, with a vague idea that Broadway started from somewhere in front of Tammany Hall and ran through the middle of Central Park to the Bronx Zoo; or how he'd stare if he could see a sketch of me in the berry-picking costume I wore when I found Inez Petersen at Tamarack Junction and let her persuade me to leave home and stepmother forever.

I didn't tell him, though. The safe bet is to tell these cleft-chin sports only where they get off, and let it ride at that.

"Listen, uncle," says I, watching him squirm at the pet name, "if I tried to chirk up all the lonely out-of-town buyers who stray in here, with

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affectionate dispositions and enough nerve to call me girly, I'd have to keep double-entry date books, and the madam would need two more waitresses in my place."

That gets him rosy in the ears. "Excuse me, sister," says he, "but you get me all wrong. Absolutely. I didn't mean a thing. Honest!"

"Then that's that," says I. "But if you should feel like getting a bit frisky, try it on our White Goddess, over at the cashier's desk. That's part of her job, acting as shock absorber for the place. You haven't missed her, have you?"

And I nods at the black-velvet throne affair over by the door, where Inez, in her white satin robe, sits spectacular behind the white enameled cash register.

"No, I've been watching her," says he. "She's a stunner, all right. That's what this friend of mine I met down at the Atlantic City druggists' convention told me. Said if I was going to stop over in New York I ought to come down to this here Greenwich Village and hunt up the 'Cave of the White Goddess.' So I did. But I'm afraid I'm a little past the goddess stage. Maybe before my bald spot spread and I took to wearing forty fats I might have sidled up to her. But not now. I've noticed that the young sports who have tried it on her to-night didn't get very far. Kind of a chilly proposition, isn't she?"

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"Inez?" says I. "Oh no. It's just that she has something on her mind. You see, she's been without her gum for nearly four hours now, and she's wondering if she couldn't slip in a couple of slabs of wintergreen without getting a call from the lady boss. Dinner all right, sir?"

"Bully!" says he. "Specially that spaghetti. Say, do you know that almost made me homesick?"

"I suppose," says I, "it was something like the way the little wife fixes it up for you?"

"Something?" says he. "Why, it was exactly the way she serves it. That is, the way she used to before—well, before she quit."

"You don't mean—" says I, rolling my eyes up toward where that kind of wives are supposed to go.

He shakes his head. "It's a thing I don't often mention," says he, "but I mean exactly what I said. She quit. Went away."

"Oh!" says I, gazing around to see if the two old-maid slummers at the middle table were going to splurge on an extra dessert. They were not. One was choking over a cigarette she was trying to smoke, and the other was watching sympathetic. "Just—just flitted, eh?" I went on. "With a handsomer guy?"

"Thank Heavens it wasn't so bad as that," says he. "No. I knew she was going. She told

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me all about it weeks before. Not that I got what it was all about, exactly. Had something to do with her not being able to stand Main Street and the Thanatopsis Club any longer. Never heard of the club myself, and we haven't any street by that name in our town as I know of. We got Marquette Avenue and Huron Street, but I can't see what anybody could object to in either of them—six or seven blocks of as good stores as you'll find anywhere, even if I do say it. Mine's the Elite Pharmacy, across from the Phoenix House and next door to the Bijou movie theater. Some way, though, Gwen seemed to get sore on the whole outfit and—”

“Just a minute,” I breaks in. “There's a party counting out a two-bit tip for a four-thirty dinner check and I gotta give 'em the cold eye or they'll get away with it.”

They did, too, but I'll bet they remember all the way back to Chillicothe or Salina that low-temperature look I gave 'em.

And then I strolled back to the visiting druggist. “Who was it you said got sore?” I asked.

“Gwen,” says he. “The wife, you know. All of a sudden, too. Appeared to be as contented and happy as any in our crowd. We were in everything there was to be in—clubs, lodges, subscription dances, dramatic association, and so on.

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She was good at dramatics, too; always had the star part. And was asked to sing at church entertainments and charity affairs. Clever at getting up costumes and decorating booths. But she kept saying she couldn't live her own life, couldn't express herself, whatever that meant. Got it from some book, I think. Anyway, that night when she broke loose at me she was mighty bitter against everything. Said she wasn't really living in a place like that, but was—well, I forget just how she did put it."

"Like she was in dead storage," I suggests.

"That was the idea," says he. "Course, I didn't dream anything would come of it. Thought she'd simmer down. And next thing I knew she was gone."

"Big scandal, eh?" I asks.

"No," says he. "I gave out that she'd gone to take care of a married sister in Bridgeport who was sick, and might stay for months. Some of the women sniffed at that, I expect, but that's all they ever got out of me, or will."

"Miss her much?" says I.

"Yes," says he. "But I'm not sore at her. Maybe I was some to blame. We didn't get out evenings very often, on account of my being tied up at the store. And I expect I have kind of settled down into a rut, as you might say. That's what she complained most about—seeing the

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same people, doing the same things, day after day, year in and year out. Said the monotony of it got on her nerves, even my wanting the same things to eat and wearing the same kind of clothes. Kind of lively and restless, Gwen always was. Likes to wear odd rigs, and do queer stunts, and say queer things. Only got the other women talking about her, and that made her wild, too. But I didn't think she'd really quit. She did, though."

I don't claim I was much thrilled over the commonplace tragedy that had come like a blight on the life of this bald-headed druggist from somewhere in Michigan, but so long as he didn't insist on having his hand held or his cheek patted I was willing to listen.

"Yes?" says I. "Been gone long?"

"Over a year," says he, "and when you're taking your meals at the Phoenix House that seems a long time. I can stand the fried steak and the rubber omelettes and the canned peas, but when they give me spaghetti that's been merely dragged through hot water and splashed with stewed tomato, I feel like I want to go out and choke the cook. Gwen spoiled me, I suppose, and when I ran across my favorite dish here, cooked just as it should be, and served with grated cheese— Say, I wish you'd pass the word back to your chef that I'm much obliged. And

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here—take this in with my compliments, will you? Wait, I'll stick in my card."

"I sure will," says I, collecting the dollar bill and the business card he handed out. "I'll give it to her myself."

And just for that I did pat him friendly on the shoulder as I cleared away his ice-cream dish and started through the swing door into the back basement, where Mrs. Tremaine had been juggling pots and pans on the gas stove all the evening. I figured that this little tribute of appreciation ought to cheer her up.

"Look, Gwendolyn!" says I. "Your cooking certainly has got you in right with one party, even if he is only an out-of-town druggist with an extension forehead and a chin dimple. It was the spaghetti l'Italienne that got him, and he's expressed his undying gratitude with a whole dollar. Not anonymous, either. Here's his card."

Gwendolyn wipes her hands on a dish towel and takes the tribute. And the next thing I knew she'd let out a gasp and slid limp into a chair. I had expected her to chuckle, or maybe laugh outright, but I hadn't looked for her to pass out like that. She isn't that kind, you know.

"Oh, come, Gwendolyn!" says I. "You mustn't let an artistic success sweep you off your feet. Nobody else even mentioned the

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spaghetti to-night, and if it hadn't been for the fact that it reminded this poddy person of his home over the drug store and the little wife who used to—"

"Please!" breaks in Gwendolyn. "I—I know him."

"Eh?" says I.

"I—I'm the little wife," says she. "It's Oscar—my husband."

"Gosh!" says I. "The one you complained to about not being able to stand Main Street and the Thanatopsis Club any longer?"

That seems to revive Gwendolyn. She starts up and stares at me. "What do you know about all that?" she demands. "How do you come to—"

"Simple enough," says I. "For the last twenty minutes your Oscar has been telling me the story of his life. No, I wasn't vamping him. Honest! He was just feeling lonesome and folksy, and the spaghetti started him off."

"How strange!" says she. "Oscar! Here!"

"Not so weird at that," says I. "He's been down to Atlantic City for a druggists' convention, and besides getting his bald spot sunburnt, he met some one who put him wise that the 'Cave of the White Goddess' was worth visiting on his way back. Well, I don't suppose you're wild about seeing him?"

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"No," says she. "I—I don't care to see him, or to have him know."

"I thought not," says I, starting to go back.

"Wait, Trilby May," says she. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, after your affair with Percey Pollock," says I.

"Oh, that!" says she, shrugging her shoulders careless.

Probably I gawped at her about then. For you remember about Percey, I suppose? He was the vaudeville artist we found here supplying the local color when this joint was The Mad Mullah, only a week or ten days ago. And during the row that followed Inez's little spanking reproof to Percey it came out that Mrs. Tremaine had been traveling with him as part of a sketch team. Of course, that might not mean much in her career, but I'm not so used to the way actors shift around that I could help showing I was a bit shocked. She got it, all right.

"You don't understand," says she. "I'd known Percey Pollock since I was a girl. He used to live in our town and we were in any number of private theatricals together before he left to go on the stage as a professional. He would write me occasionally. Oscar knew all about it. He wasn't worried. Rather a sissy-boy, Percey was. No harm in him. He simply gave me a

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chance to go on the stage when I—well, when I went away from home. But I couldn't stand vaudeville. It was awful; you've no idea. So I persuaded Percey to go in with me here as the Mad Mullah. That's all there was to it."

"Oh!" says I. "Then maybe you would like a few words with Oscar?"

"I—I think not," says she. "Why should I?"

"He's kind of lonesome," says I.

"Stupid persons usually are," says Gwendolyn. "No inner resources. I wonder how he's been passing his off evenings since I've been away? Either at some lodge, or going to the movies, or playing solitaire, I suppose. Did he tell you how I used to nag him, trying to get him interested in outside things, to read books, and so on?"

"No," says I. "Chiefly he described what a wonder you were and how he couldn't blame you for leaving."

"Isn't that just like Oscar!" says she. "Always good natured. Is—is he still out there?"

"He was a minute ago," says I.

"But I couldn't see him like this," says Gwendolyn. "I should have to slip upstairs and change. I shouldn't want to have him find me looking like a cook. Could you hold him for ten or fifteen minutes, Trilby May?"

"Nothing simpler," says I. "He's got no place to go but out. And if there's going to be a re-

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union perhaps I'd better shunt that other party, eh?"

"Do," says Gwendolyn.

So while she dashes up the back stairs I goes in and whispers to Oscar that he's made a big hit with the cook. "Stick around," says I, "if you've nothing better to do."

"I haven't," says he.

"Then watch me put the skids under that bunch of chair warmers who take this for an all-night waiting room," says I.

It's done by bustling around busy, brushing the crumbs in their laps, and shoving in the bill with the finger bowls. They'd no more than paid up and started for the door than Inez yawns twice, retrieves her gum cud from the back of the throne, and glances annoyed at Oscar.

"Don't bother about him," I says, in her ear. "He's going to get the surprise of his life shortly. Who do you guess he is?"

"Him?" says Inez. "I dunno."

"S-s-sh!" says I. "Gwendolyn's hubby that she tossed into the discards a year or so back."

"Huh!" says Inez. "Not much, eh?"

Which is all the imagination she has. If she ever happens to be a Mrs. Enoch Arden I'll bet all the greeting Enoch gets will be a "Well, where you stay so long?" As for me, I was almost as thrilled as if I was waiting for the

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second act of a melodrama. In fact, I had to mix in and set the stage a little by shifting Oscar around so he couldn't see Gwendolyn when she first came in the door, and then sitting down opposite him so I could.

"Tell me," says I, "didn't you ever try to find the missing wife?"

"What was the use?" says he. "If she'd wanted to come back she would. I heard she went on the stage, and after that—well, I expect living over the drug store with me would seem tamer than ever."

"Think you'd like to see her again?" I went on.

"Would I!" says he. "I—I can't tell you how much."

"You needn't," says I, as I hears the door knob turn. "Just look over your right shoulder."

She's a quick-change artist, I'll say. For in those few minutes she'd not only shifted from a grease-splashed kimono to a spiffy evening dress, but she'd done up the henna-tinted hair artistic and brushed in a complexion that would have done credit to a blushing bride. In fact, I never saw her look better. And I guess Oscar hadn't.

"Gwen!" says he, breathing it out husky.

"Well, Oscar?" says she, holding out a friendly hand.

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Which seemed to be my cue for calling it a day. When I suggests that Inez and I will be going along now, though, she shakes her head.

"Since you seem to know all about both of us," says she, "why not stay? There's going to be no deep emotional scene, I hope. Just a meeting of two old friends. Eh, Oscar?"

"Sure," says he. "You're looking mighty fine, Gwen. Is this your—er—"

"Yes," says she. "It's my enterprise. Glad you liked the spaghetti. You see, on account of a disabled cook I had to fix it myself."

"I might have known, Gwen," says he, "that nobody could do it just like that. So—so this is where you've landed?" and he looks around, curious.

She shrugs her shoulders. "Yes," says she. "In The Cave of the White Goddess. I have expressed my artistic self at last, you see."

Oscar stares at her, sort of puzzled. "You—you like this sort of thing, do you?" he asks.

"Oh, well enough," says she. "That is, when I'm not having trouble with the cooks, or the landlord doesn't turn fractious, or the slumming parties are not too tiresome. But how are things at home?"

"Oh, just about the same," says he. "I've built on that sleeping porch we talked so much about. Put it over the back L by the big maple,

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just as you'd planned. Had the back yard cleaned up, too."

"Really!" says Gwendolyn.

"And while I was at it," he goes on, "I had 'em change the bathroom as you wanted—built-in tub, tiled floor, and everything. Makes it kind of nice."

"I should think it would," says Gwendolyn. "But, how's everybody? Kate Marshall still running the subscription dances and the bridge club?"

"I believe so," says Oscar. "The Dramatic Association, too. They put on a piece last spring and she took the leading part."

"Kate did?" says Gwendolyn. "Oh, that's rich! We were all pretty poor actors, but she was the worst. What about Minnie Carter? Is she just as gay as ever?"

"Not quite," says Oscar. "She had twins last March, you know; and Dick Carter is prouder than he was when he was elected mayor. Went out and bought a limousine, first thing, to drive 'em around in. But they are a fine pair of twins, no getting away from that. I was over there to dinner the other night."

"Oh!" says Gwendolyn. "Minnie took pity on you, I suppose? Where do you get your meals now, Oscar?"

"Me?" says he. "Well, I've been eating at

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the Phoenix mostly. I stand it as long as I can and then I shift to the Bon Ton lunch for a while. I've been having some stomach trouble."

"I should think you would," says she. "The Phoenix and the Bon Ton!"

"I know," says Oscar. "Might have got some one to come in and cook the meals for me, I expect, but I kind of hate eating alone. And then, I can leave the store more 'n I used to. Got a new prescription clerk. Smart young feller. Knows his job. That's how I was able to take this trip. But by next Monday I'll be back at the old grind, I suppose."

"You—you'll have something to tell them, won't you?" she asks.

"Eh?" says Oscar.

"About me," says she.

"All that I'll ever tell 'em is what they've heard," says he, "and that is to keep their tongues off'm you."

"What a loyal old silly you are!" says Gwendolyn. "Were you thinking I might come back sometime?"

Oscar poked the cigar ashes around in his saucer with the end of his unlighted cigar and dropped his eyes bashful. "I kinda hoped you might," says he. "I—I—"

"Well?" she urges.

"You'd laugh," says he.

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"No. I promise," says she. "Go on. You what?"

"I even prayed you would," says he, his voice breaking in an absurd crack and his chin dropping still lower.

Gwendolyn didn't laugh. She was biting her under lip nervous and gripping her left hand with her right. "Fancy that!" says she. "And you never were much at praying, Oscar."

"No," says he. "Nor at anything else, except running a drug store. I didn't think it would do any good, either, but I—I couldn't help—"

"You're mistaken, Oscar," says Gwendolyn. "It's worked."

"What!" says he. "You don't mean—"

"Yes," says Gwendolyn. "I'm coming back. I think I can express myself better in cooking spaghetti for you than in any other way I've tried. Anyway, that's the program. What I shall do with this place here I don't know. We'll have to talk that over. But I'm coming."

And you should have seen the beaming expression on Oscar's moon face. "Glory be!" says he, reaching across the table for one of Gwendolyn's hands.

"Not yet," says she. "Wait until I send home these two girls before they're thoroughly shocked. Forgive me, Trilby May. I didn't imagine we

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should get in as deep as this. Explain it all to Inez, will you?"

"That's some proposition," says I. "Look how excited she is."

For, as usual at this hour of night, Inez is yawning between yanks on the gum. And by the time I'd woke her up and we'd got into our street clothes the reunion was well under way. As we left, Gwendolyn and Oscar were sitting cozy in a corner, chatting away confidential.

"Darn!" says I, after we'd closed the door.

"Who that guy?" asks Inez. "What's the matter?"

"I'll give you the tragic details in the morning, Inez," says I. "But it looks like you'd chewed your way through another job."

Chapter XI

Trilby and the Trick Uncle

“**L**OOK, Inez,” says I, as we wandered back to Miss Wellby’s prunery late that night after the lady boss of our Greenwich Village joint had announced that she meant to sell out and go back to Michigan with the druggist hubby I’d discovered for her. “See who’s waiting for you on the front steps.”

“Huh!” says Inez, who’s been dragging her heels all the way from the L station. “That newspaper feller?”

“None other,” says I. “Barry Platt, the constant knight of the clicking Corona. And he’s waiting patiently, poor chap, for a few kind words from you.”

“Poor boob!” says Inez. “I—I’m sleepy.”

So, while the lady of his heart’s desire yawned her way past him, I had to park myself alongside of Barry and be as comforting as I knew how. I’ll say I’m not so poor at it, even if nobody else tells you. Course, I could do better with the stage setting a little more romantic than the

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brownstone steps of a West Fifty-seventh Street boarding house. But at that, with Ruby giggling at the basement door to an admiring bell hop who has fallen for her dusky charms; and Miss Smithers, the old-maid stenog, stretching an ear from the second-floor hall bedroom just above; and an audience of maybe half a hundred apartment house dwellers staring across the street—Well, I didn't get stage fright, anyway.

"You're late to-night, Trilby May," says Barry.

"How nice of you to know that, Barry boy," says I.

"Oh, I keep track of—of you both," says he. "Must have been a big evening at the 'Cave of the White Goddess'?"

"Not so much big," says I, "as—lemme see, what's the word? I got it! Crucial."

"Whaddye mean, crucial?" asks Barry.

"Another crossroads," says I. "Looks like our career in the Village had come to a full stop. In other words, Barry, I'm afraid we're overboard again."

Then I sketched out for him how Mrs. Tremaine, after a year of wandering up and down and trying out various schemes for self-expression, had decided to quit and go back with her moon-faced Oscar to Main Street, Michigan.

"Just when the place was making a big hit,"

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says I, "and we were getting the hang of the business. The worst of it is, I shall always feel that I talked myself out of it. You see, if I hadn't allowed this tank-town druggist to get chatty and tell me the story of his life, he'd never found out that it was his dear Gwendolyn who cooked the spaghetti. But I did. I even egged on the get-together. So the ship is scuttled."

"But what will she do with the place?" demands Barry.

"Oh, most likely she'll sell out at a bargain to some third cousin of Caruso," says I, "or else call in a second-hand man and just close up. Either way we're thrown for a loss."

"Now, don't you worry," says Barry Platt, smoothing the back of my right hand cheerful.

"Go on, hold it if you feel that way," says I. "I promise not to wake Inez up and bulletin the fact if you do. Attaboy! Comes easier when you can't see me so plain, doesn't it? No, I don't mind a bit. It's good for my shy nature to get a jolt like that once in awhile. And as for worrying, that's the seldomest thing I do, Barry. Inez and I haven't any schedule to make. We're just on our way, flitting from job to job like a pair of carefree humming birds who have forgotten which bush they started to build a nest in last. That's us. And before we get to

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the hunger point times will have to be so hard that there 'll be free soup kitchens in every block."

At that Barry actually squeezed my hand. "You're a great team, you and Inez," says he.

"Yes," says I. "Inez is the sleeping partner. Good night, Barry."

He's a nice, fair-haired youth, Barry; I like the polite little tricks he pulls, showing that he's been brought up in a real home by a real mother; and I'm strong for the hesitating way he springs that chummy smile of his when he's about to say or do something that would be fresh in anyone else. Also, I suspect there's a lot of real thinking goes on back of those sunny blue eyes of his. But why should I waste perfectly good slumber hours on a young hick who can't see me except as sort of a trailer to an oversized Swede girl that's long on curves and complexion but whose chief mental trait is a passion for gum?

Ever since Barry helped us stage that little dinner party for Inez's elusive Uncle Nels, though, he has seemed to declare himself in as one of us; not merely as a casual friend, but as volunteer guide and counselor. Maybe he felt kind of guilty for scaring off the tightwad uncle the way we did at that roof-garden blow. Anyway, he never fails to look us up at least once a day and get a report on how things are coming.

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Actually seems interested, which is more or less soothing, when there are so few who hardly know you exist.

So next morning, when I broke the sad news to Inez, at breakfast, that we'd probably be at liberty again by night, and she'd asked what I was going to do about it, I told her that I couldn't say until we'd been really let go and I'd had a talk with Barry.

"Him!" says Inez, shrugging her wide shoulders. "Lotta good he'll be."

"I know," says I. "But at least he'll listen to our troubles."

And when we reported earlier than usual at the "Cave," things did look as uncertain as I'd expected. Even more so. Mrs. Tremaine was excited and fluttery.

"Oscar's a regular old dear," says she. "I don't know how I should ever have managed without him. He's been out to see some café agents, and has two customers who are coming around this evening. One of them is a Hungarian who manages three other places uptown and has been looking for a good buy in the Village. Oscar thinks he's sure to make some kind of an offer that I can accept."

"That'll be nice," says I. "A Hungarian, eh? And he'll probably put in a jazz orchestra, and feature goulash on the menu, with Inez and me

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retired in favor of an old girl who will wear big gold hoops in her ears, and a squad of pie-faced heroes who've just drifted in from Czechoslovakia."

"I'm sorry, Trilby May," says Gwendolyn. "We were doing so well here, too. But you understand, I'm sure."

"Oh yes," says I. "You've heard the call of Main Street again. And there's the new sleeping porch over the drug store, and the revised bathroom, not to mention a lonesome hubby who wants to lead you back. I don't blame you a bit. Grab him. They're not all like that, I hear, and my guess is that yours is worth another try. But what about to-night? Business as usual?"

"Very much so," says Gwendolyn. "In fact, I have sent word to a number of my old regulars that I'd like to have them come this evening as my guests."

"Going to paper the house, eh?" says I. "Ought to be something in that, too. And if it works our finale should be a busy one."

It was all of that. The parties began trickling in through the alley before six-thirty, and by seven-thirty we were playing to capacity and giving 'em hot spoons for their ice cream and damp napkins for their knees. Eh? Well, whenever you get hot silver in a restaurant you may know that the supply isn't equal to the demand

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and that the dish-washing machine is being speeded up. The soggy napkins we had delivered on a hurry call from the laundry in the next block.

It was lucky that Madam Hortense, the French war widow who does most of our cooking, had recovered from her toothache attack of the night before and was on the job again, for Gwendolyn never could have stood the strain. Besides, this was onion soup night, and that's a confection that simply must be made by a person who can call it *potage à l'ognon*, to have it taste right. Hortense must have spread herself on this particular task, too, for a bunch of real artists got so enthusiastic over it that they blew kisses toward the kitchen door. I wish they could have had a glimpse of Madam Hortense, though. She's about as wide as she is high, has ankles like the leg of a billiard table, and shaves every Sunday.

It was one of the best crowds we've had, from an artistic and tipping standpoint. Besides, the usual run of two-room meal hunters there was one real poet in a khaki shirt and brown corduroy pants, a fair sprinkling of bobbed-haired girls from near-by studios, and a table full of society slummers in evening dress who brought their own Martinis in a silver teapot. You know? It was the kind of gathering that makes the strays from Utica and Lacrosse sure that they're

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seeing life as it is advertised in the Sunday papers. Anyway, with five courses to serve, it kept Gwendolyn and Rosa and me on the jump for nearly three hours, without much let-up.

So it was late in the evening before I had time to take much notice of this old boy who was sitting back at a little corner table with Oscar, the druggist hubby, and Barry Platt. He hadn't been in for dinner, but had joined them later, and Gwendolyn had given him a demi-tasse with his cigar. I don't know as I should have looked at him very close even then if I hadn't seen Barry introducing him to Mrs. Tremaine. And soon after that Gwendolyn comes over to where I'm checking up a dinner bill with Inez, and announces, triumphant:

"Well, it's all settled, girls. The place is sold!"

"To the goulish magnate?" says I.

"No," says she. "Oscar found some one who overbid the Hungarian. That is the new proprietor, over there."

"The one with the water curl in his raven locks?" says I. "There isn't much of him but hair, is there? Looks kind of shrunk and dried up, especially about the neck and shoulders. But I suppose he knows all about the restaurant business?"

"I don't believe he does," says Gwendolyn.

"I understand he is to turn over the 'Cave' to a



A WIG! AND WHEN IT WAS LIFTED THERE WAS A SANDY, GRIZZLED HEAD THAT I'D SEEN SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE

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relative to manage for him. They're signing the papers now."

"Then you can't tell whether or not we go as part of the fixtures, eh?" I asks.

Gwendolyn winks at me mysterious. "When there's a change of owners," says she, "one never knows what may happen. Perhaps something very nice."

"Not with that kind of hair," says I. "My hunch is that Inez and I had better write out our resignations now."

"Oh, I wouldn't be in a hurry about that," says Gwendolyn, smiling contented. "Oscar says he's quite an odd character, the new proprietor. If I were you I'd just wait and see; I would, really."

"Say, you're getting me curious," says I. "Who is this mysterious stranger, anyway? I think I'll go get a close-up of him."

"No, no!" breaks in Gwendolyn. "I—I wouldn't."

But I'd already started, and before the trio in the corner knew it I was standing over the table. Barry spots me first and jumps up hasty, as if he was trying to block me off.

"We don't need a thing, thanks," says he. "Not a thing, Trilby May."

"No?" says I.

I'd managed to get a front view, though, and

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in spite of the big smoked glasses the new boss was wearing there was something familiar about the high-colored nose with the peaked end and the narrow, sagging shoulders. Also, where had I seen those ruddy, wrinkled cheeks, before? But the black, wavy hair, puzzled me most.

"We'll be through here in just a moment," urges Barry, sort of waving me off.

"Sorry," says I. "Orders are to crumb the table."

With that I edged past him and got busy with a napkin. The stranger had just laid down his fountain pen, and it was easy to brush it on to the floor. Then we both made a dive for it, and some way the little pins that fasten my white cuffs got caught in the dark locks, and I was prompted to jerk my arm up at just the right moment. Even at that I had to gasp at the result. It was removable hair. A wig! And when it was lifted there was a sandy, grizzled head that I'd seen several times before.

"Why, Uncle Nels!" says I.

He don't seem embarrassed or ashamed at having been scalped in public that way. He just acts peeved.

"There!" says he. "Didn't I tell you? Such foolishness. Here! Put it away." At which he snatches the wig and tosses it at Barry Platt.

And I must say that I never saw Barry look

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quite so foolish as when the thing lands in his lap. "I suppose I might have known I couldn't put anything over on you, Trilby May," says he.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," says I. "But it wasn't such a subtle disguise, Barry. Now, if you'd picked out a white wig—"

"It wasn't a case of picking," says he. "I just happened to have this one in my trunk. Besides, I wasn't sure I could get him to wear it in here. Don't you see?"

"I can follow you that far," says I. "But why the masquerade at all?"

Barry hesitates and glances at Uncle Nels. "Shall we tell her now?" he asks.

Uncle Nels sheds the smoked glasses and nods.

"Well," goes on Barry, "it was this way. He had heard that you and Inez were here and that the place was to be sold. So he thought he'd buy it for Inez and let you two run it. But he didn't mean to have either of you know who was doing it."

"Huh!" says I. "How did he expect to keep it from us?"

"Why," says Barry, "he—he was going to do it through me."

"As an anonymous friend, eh?" says I. "Barry, you're a great little schemer. And you brought him right in here to settle up the deal, did you?"

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"I thought it would be rather good fun," says he.

"Well, is it all fixed?" I demands.

"Complete," says Barry. "Here are the papers."

"Wait until I tell Inez," says I. "She ought to be in on the celebration."

Of course she hasn't noticed anything unusual going on over in the corner. Inez never does. Nothing less than an earthquake, or having Bill Hart ride in and begin shooting out the electric bulbs, would seriously disturb that placid poise of hers, especially when she's been without her gum for three hours and has just sneaked in a fresh cud. So I finds her sitting there calm and regal in her White Goddess costume, staring peaceful at the cash register.

"Come out of it, Inez," says I. "Guess who's shown up again."

"Hey?" says Inez. "Who?"

"That dehydrated uncle of yours," says I.

"Uncle Nels?" says she.

"The very one," says I.

"What for he come?" asks Inez.

"This time," says I, "his role seems to be that of an off-season Santa Claus. Listen close, Inez, and be careful not to inhale your spear-mint when I slip you the gladsome details. Your elusive and hard-boiled uncle has had the

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merry little notion of buying this place for us to run."

The way Inez expresses deep and violent emotion is by opening her lips slightly and letting a flicker of almost human intelligence come into the big gray eyes. Unless you're watching her close, though, you'll miss it entirely. But I knew the symptoms well. I'm an authority on Inez. I could almost write a book on her. And yet, her mental processes are always surprising to me when I get their drift.

"No," says she. "Not Uncle Nels."

"I'll admit it doesn't seem logical," says I, "but there he is, over there with Barry and Mr. Tremaine. And it's all settled. Gwendolyn and her hubby will probably beat it for Michigan to-morrow, and the joint will be ours. How's that for a lucky break and a happy ending?"

"Swell, hey?" says Inez, making a dental display that would get a tooth power ad. man rushing for a camera. "He—he's some uncle!"

"By unanimous vote," says I. "We've called him an old tightwad, and a trick uncle, and things like that, but I hereby move that those words be stricken from the record. The ayes have it. Three cheers for Uncle Nels."

Inez has quit smiling, though, and gone thoughtful again. "How—how he know we are here?" she asks.

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"Hm-m-m!" says I, resting one hand on my hip and propping up my chin with the other. "As usual, Inez, your single-track mind has led straight to the blind switch. But that's a point we'll take up later. I must bring Uncle Nels over and let him see how easy you are to look at in your Goddess get-up."

"All right," says Inez, giving it the Minnesota inflection.

And when I asked Uncle Nels if he didn't want to come and see his niece that he's been so kind and generous to, he grunts that he would.

"She's by the kitchen, Inez?" he asks.

"What an odd conceit!" says I. "Why should you think Inez would be in the kitchen?"

"Well, she's the cook here, ain't she?" he asks.

"Cook!" says I. "Inez! Say, don't make me laugh when I've just had my hair curled. Why, Inez couldn't qualify as cook at a Girl Scout's bacon bat, and she'd be the first to deny it."

Uncle Nels seems disappointed. "What—what she do, then?" he demands.

"Do you mean you didn't recognize her?" says I, "or was it that Barry smuggled you in here in such a hurry that you had no chance to look around? Anyway, if you'll swing to the left you'll see Inez. That's it! That's her on the throne effect, in all the white satin and pearls."

Uncle Nels took a good long look before the

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dazed expression crept into his faded eyes. For even when she's sitting at ease, yanking her gum, Inez looms up dazzling and impressive. As the White Goddess she certainly is in a class by herself. It would be hard to find anyone who could look more spotless or more goddessy. But I doubt if Uncle Nels is a judge of such types.

"Huh!" he snorts. "That all she does—chew gum?"

"Oh, that's just her side line, says I. "Incidentally, too, she's the cashier; but her main job is to give us a good excuse for the name of the place and to supply the local color."

"No—no other work?" he asks.

"Oh, a little emergency dish washing now and then," says I.

Uncle Nels shakes his head. "Girls should work," says he. "At home she did it, plenty. She had to scrub floors, and hoe potatoes, and do the wash."

"Yes, I know," says I. "And she had to chop wood and feed the pigs and milk eight cows and make butter. She's told me about that, and how her old man used to persuade her with a rake handle. That's why she quit and went off hunting for the rich uncle she'd heard her folks talking about."

"Me?" says Uncle Nels. "I ain't rich; I'm just foolish. Buying a place like this! I can't

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afford it. Mister Platt, you show me them papers again."

But Barry's a smooth youth. He pretends not to see the hand that's held out eager. "I'll do better than that, Uncle Nels," says he. "I'll send you copies of them to-morrow. And you know what I told you about how good an investment this was? You wait! By fall you and the girls will be coining money here, simply coining it."

Uncle Nels eyes him steady for a minute with a suspicious squint, but then he gives a shrug of the shoulders. "Well," says he, "what's done is done. But it's a loss having an expensive girl like that loafing around; a dead loss. And I'll make up no bad debts. Understand?"

He has started for the door, still shaking his head and growling, when I calls to him. "Say, Uncle Nels, are you going to run off without having a word with your favorite niece?"

"Bah!" says he. "My expensive niece, that's what she is." And he bangs the door after him.

"What a dear old uncle!" says I. "Lucky Inez isn't sensitive. See? She heard that without batting an eye."

"She's a perfect brick, isn't she?" says Barry.

"In some ways," says I. "But just a second, Barry. Where did you dig up Uncle Nels again at such a timely hour and on such short notice?"

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"Why," says he, scraping his foot, "I—I happened to run across him."

"Yes, you did!" says I. "Come, now! Uncle Nels had disappeared. You said so yourself. He'd moved from where he was living, early one morning, without leaving any address. And I know he's too foxy an old boy to let anyone just happen to run across him."

"Well?" says Barry, with his chin still down.

"You've been in touch with him all along, haven't you?" says I. "Been keeping him posted on where we were and what we were doing? Eh?"

"Oh, what's the use?" says Barry, falling back on that chummy smile of his. "You'd get hep to anything, Trilby May. But he isn't such an old grouch as he seems. Honest. And I believe he's rather strong for Inez, and you, too. Only he has his own ideas and needs a lot of humoring."

"Very well," says I. "We'll humor him, in our own way. I've never tackled the job of running a rubberneck joint before, but if a lot of these low-brow foreigners can make a go of their places, I don't see why I can't do as well with this. Anyway, we've got a fair start."

"Thanks to Uncle Nels," puts in Barry.

"Maybe," I admits. "But I still insist that he's a trick uncle."

Chapter XII

Inez Finds a Flapper Hound

AS I was telling Inez only yesterday, there is some use in having a rich uncle, after all, even if he is one of the disappearing kind. For there we were just on the brink, as you might say, of a financial crash, when up bobs her uncle Nels, buys this Greenwich Village joint outright, and turns us loose with it. That's service, I'll say. Course, he walks out on us before anyone could even kiss him on his bald spot, but being co-bosses of the "Cave of the White Goddess" is a lot better than having 'em give you the gate.

And then, we still have Barry Platt. Nothing elusive or inconstant about him. I don't know just how important this newspaper job of his is, but it certainly leaves him time enough to drift in here for an hour or so every evening. Not that he tries to mix in with the management, or asks to paw over the books, or criticizes the menu. No. He seems content to slip in behind a corner table and feast his eyes on Inez as she sits regal back of the cash register.

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"How about it, Barry?" I asked last night, "are you representing Uncle Nels now, or is this merely a social visit?"

"Oh, quite unofficial," says he. "You don't mind, do you, Trilby May?"

"Not a bit," says I. "In fact, it's rather cheering to have you drop around."

"Business still seems brisk," he comments.

"Picking up right along," says I. "And I thought that by midsummer it would slack off. Where all these folks come from who are willing to walk through a back alley and into a cellar to pay one seventy-five for a cold-storage chicken and spaghetti dinner, is what gets me."

"It's the publicity from those raids and investigations that brings 'em," Barry explains. "Why, the Village has been advertised from one end of the country to the other, and whenever a tourist strikes New York he hunts up the district and comes down here, expecting to see all sorts of wicked goings-on."

"And what he really does see," says I, "is Inez. Eh?"

Barry pinks up in the ears a little at that. "I suppose some of these birds try to get fresh now and then, don't they?"

I shrugs my shoulders. "The male of the species, Barry," says I, "is always almost more or less frisky when he's away from home. They

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even have the nerve to chuck me under the chin when I'm serving them. But I get even by adding a quarter cover charge to the bill, and if necessary I can tell 'em exactly where they get off."

"I know, Trilby May," says he. "You're all right. But—but how about Inez?"

"That's a worry you can cross off at the start," says I. "Of course, they nearly all hand her the line of talk they've had success with before, and some of these small-town cut-ups are fluent kidders. They call her everything from 'sister' to 'sweetie,' and about once a night some mushy widower hints how he'd like to steal her for his very own. But none of it registers with Inez. She displays her dimples while the love barrage is on, but as soon as they've passed by she yawns and tries to remember where she parked her gum. No, Barry, joshing Inez isn't a profitable pastime, except for the house; and it gets 'em just as far as tickling a stone lion in the ribs. So we don't need to fence her in with an iron grill or anything like that."

Barry shakes his head, though. "I hope no one tries to pull any rough stuff when you two are alone down here," he says.

"I trust not," says I, "for I'd hate to see Inez start throwing 'em around while she was wearing that goddess costume. It would be just like her to forget."

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And yet it wasn't twenty minutes later when I noticed this dark-eyed Adonis with the wavy black pompadour and the cutie mustachette, draping himself over the little counter and whispering chatty to Inez. Then I remembered having seen him go through the same performance only a few nights before. But this time he seems to have dressed the part more elaborately, for he has on a braid-bound cutaway with a flower in his lapel, and he's carrying gloves and a walking stick. Also, he is presenting Inez with a real orchid. As she is ducking her chin coy, and doesn't seem to be trying to shunt him along as usual, I drops back to Barry's table and nudges him.

"Oh, I've seen it all," says he. "Who is this gay bird?"

"One of our most regulars," says I. "Must be some young plute who has strayed down from his Fifth Avenue club."

"Huh!" says Barry. "More likely some member of the ex-Service Bartenders' League who's turned booze agent. She seems to be falling for him, too."

"Well, he has got romantic orbs," says I. "And what wonderful hair! Regular crow black, isn't it?"

"And a beak like a buzzard," adds Barry.

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "Quite a striking

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profile, I should say; and with that dead-white complexion he is rather distinguished looking."

"You women!" says Barry. "Any floorwalker with a crimp in his front hair and a cane hung on his arm gets you. Doesn't register, eh? Say, look what he's putting over now!"

As a matter of fact, the dark stranger is getting a bit free. He is patting Inez on the arm, and while there's a good deal to pat that's no sign that anybody with busy fingers is welcome.

"One of these fast workers, I take it," says I.

"Only say the word, Trilby May," explodes Barry, "and I'll step over there and plant a half-arm jolt in the middle of his pie-faced map."

"That's real hero talk, Barry," says I, "but it's a trifle heady, isn't it? He'd make nearly two of you. Besides, with the cops so snoopy, we can't afford a scene. Keep your temperature down, Barry, and let me do the crashing in."

"But if you need me," says he, "just remember that—"

"Quite so," says I. "The light artillery in reserve. Meanwhile watch me turn this ardent bonfire into a mosquito smudge."

With which I sidles over to the black throne just as Inez is giving her active admirer a come-on roll from her big gray eyes. It was really too bad to break in on this tender scene, for it's plain enough that at last Inez has met in real life the

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sort of movie-star type she's always talking about. But arm patting is a little beyond the limit; at least, it is in our place. And a tableful of summer-school folks from the Middle West were beginning to stare.

"Excuse me, Inez," says I, "but who's your new friend?"

"Him?" says Inez, getting flushed under the eyes. "He—he's Mister Roland."

"Charmed," says I. "I'm Trilby May Dodge. Pardon me for edging in, but I noticed you trying to get acquainted with Inez, and I didn't know but you might need a little help."

"Thanks," says Roland. "We're getting on rather well."

"From a standing start, I should say you were," says I. "Orchids as a curtain raiser, eh?"

"For one so lovely as Miss Inez," says he, "it's a poor thing to give."

"Not so badly put, either," says I. "Been feeding her much like that, have you?"

"When one beholds cheeks like the rose leaf and eyes like sad stars at dawn," says Roland, "one has the eloquence of a poet. Not that I am such, but I have the feeling—here," and he thumps himself on the chest about over the left-hand upper vest pocket.

"Anyway," says I, "it's nice of you to mention it. And it all leads up to what may I ask?"

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"I would give myself the pleasure," says he, "of taking Miss Inez to the theater, with perhaps a little supper after."

"Say, you are some speed artist, aren't you?" says I. "But back up, Roland. You're running past your signals."

"Excuse?" says he, lifting his heavy eyebrows.

"Nothing doing," says I. "Get that?"

"But I am sure Miss Inez understands," says he. "Is it not so, *ma belle chérie*?"

"Who told you she was your cherry?" says I.

"Ah, but listen," he protests. "She is about to say that she will go. Eh, my dear Inez? Tell your friend that you have trust in me. Yes?"

And with that he reaches out to begin the arm patting again. But I blocked him a sharp elbow.

"Say, but you have got the most restless hands!" says I. "Put 'em up, stow 'em in your pockets if you can't make them behave. Who are you, anyway? Roland what?"

He hunches his shoulders and laughs. "Forgive," says he. "The skin of satin tempts, and I forget. As for who I am—well, I am in business on Broadway. For the present the charming Miss Inez knows me only as Roland. Sometime very soon, I hope, I shall tell her all about myself. That will be a happy moment for me. Ah yes! Meanwhile we must get acquainted,

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and how is it to be done here? Not at all. So you see that the theater, the little supper, the drive through the park, are of necessity for us. You would like it—eh, Inez?”

“Swell,” says Inez.

“There!” says he. “You observe?”

“Uh-huh,” says I. “Looks very much as though you’d made the grade with Inez. But I guess you’ve overlooked me, haven’t you?”

“You?” says he, staring.

“I’m the other half of the sketch,” says I, “and we always travel double. Of course, it’s sweet of you to want to make it a three-handed party; but entertaining the tired business stranger after hours isn’t quite in my line. Sorry to hurry you, but you’ll find the main exit over at the left, Roland.”

For a second or so he gawped at me, surprised and a bit scornful. Maybe he didn’t expect such a bump from a mere waitress with bobbed hair and gooseberry-green eyes. But he recovers well. He gives me an easy laugh and spreads his hands eloquent. They’re white, soft-looking hands, with the nails manicured like a leading lady’s.

“There, there, girlie!” says he, soothing. “Don’t worry about your friend. With me she will be as safe as at home. I am a man of honor and standing. But when I admire a lovely lady

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and she does me the favor of accepting my invitation, I allow no one to obstruct. No one."

And he shoved out his well-scraped jaw as he said it.

"Oh!" says I. "Think you're one of these go-getters, do you? Well, here's where you skid."

"We shall see," says he. "Come, Miss Inez, we will depart at once."

"Inez, sit still," says I.

"Aw, don't be a crab!" says Inez. "I like to go. This once."

"No," says I.

"Pooh!" says Roland, grabbing Inez by the arm. "Never mind her. By the time you have changed the taxi will be waiting. Come!"

"Say, if you will pull down trouble, don't say I didn't warn you," says I, as I turns to give Barry Platt the nod.

And Barry was already on his toes for the start. In three jumps he was among those present, and with the sparks flying from his light-blue eyes he did look more or less hostile.

But Roland, the six-cylinder Romeo, who tops him by more than a head, glances down at Barry with easy contempt. "Pouff!" says he. "For such as him I care not that," and he snaps his fingers.

"S-s-s-sh!" says I. "Don't get reckless, Roland. He's Kid Platt, the light-weight champ,

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and two of his punches would send you to a white iron cot in the casualty ward."

"Wha-at!" he gasps. "A—a box fighter?"

I nods careless. "The fightingest box fighter you ever met," says I. "He may not look it, but oh, boy! what a wallop! Biff, bang! And there they are, laid out flat, waiting for the stretcher. Sometimes he's messy about it, too; smashes 'em in the eye, dislocates a nose, or jars loose an ear. They're never the same afterwards. Have to be sewed up. So don't rouse him."

When I have to throw a bluff I don't believe in skimping the details. And I must have made 'em kind of vivid, for that bluish jaw of Roland's goes saggy and his eyes get bugged. I suppose he was seeing himself all mussed up and gory, and his cutaway coat ripped up the back. And just then Inez has to horn in with the rebuttal stuff.

"How foolish!" says she. "That Barry he's only newspaper reporter."

"Oh-ho!" says Roland, reviving.

"In disguise," says I. "The last time he was in the ring he hit a man so hard—well, he has to keep quiet until he hears from the hospital."

"What whoppers!" says Inez.

"Will you shush once?" says I, giving her an elbow jab.

But Roland is getting over his brief panic. "I

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am terrified—not,” says he. “I do what I please.”

“Not while I’m around, you big stiff,” says Barry, white as a napkin, but bristling up to him with his fingers bunched.

“So?” says Roland. “And what is that to you?”

They were glaring at each other almost murderous when I promptly shoved between them. “Please, gentlemen!” says I, “not in here. Anyway, not until I can shoo this dinner party out and lock the door. You can hold in the assault and batter that long, can’t you? And by that time perhaps you can work up a real quarrel. You haven’t either of you more than half expressed your dislike for the other, have you?”

“I can tell him what he is in very few words,” says Barry. “He’s a flapper hound.”

“Bah!” says Roland. “You—you are a—”

But that’s as far as he got. The rest of his remark seemed to choke him, for he stuttered and gurgled and stared over Barry’s shoulder. Of course I turned and looked, too, only to see a quietly dressed, youngish woman, with snappy black eyes and jet ear dangles. She had come in during the debate and stood listening. But when she did speak it was in a cold, cutting voice, with a foreign accent.

“Flapper hound is true,” says she. “I have

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not heard it before, but it is a good name for him."

"Marie!" says Roland, gaspy.

"So this is your special meeting of the labor union!" she demands. "For this you put on the Sunday coat? For this you peench the ten dollar from inside the clock? Hein?"

Every word she snaps out crisp and sharp, with those black eyes fairly blazing at Roland. But he's a smooth performer. I could guess that he's been up against an emergency like this before, for after the first jolt he tries to smile, and stands there caressing his mustache.

"It is all a big mistake, my dear Marie," says he. "I shall explain to you and you will laugh."

"Oh, will I?" says Marie. "But I have watch from outside. I have heard. I know. Your old tricks. You have come here to make love to some young lady. Which one. You?" And she looks straight at me.

"You flatter me," says I. "Take another look, then glance at Inez, and have one more guess. Ah, now you've got it."

Marie gives Inez the swift up and down, and then shrugs her shoulders. "He does not always choose them so—so beeg," says she, with a sniff.

"Few of 'em run that size," says I, "or have her appetite for after-theater suppers. Yet that

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was part of his proposition, and if he was planning to do it all on ten dollars I call it a sporty one."

"Don't listen, Marie," protests Roland. "It—it is not so."

"That's easy," says I. "Ask Inez."

But Inez is all set to ask some information for herself. She wants it direct from Roland, the romantic, and her way of attracting his attention is to stretch out a lovely white arm that has often turned a feed cutter all day long, grip a set of strong fingers under the collar of the cutaway, and drag the recently ardent one firmly up against the cashier's desk.

"She—she your wife?" demands Inez, calm but businesslike.

"Why—er—yes, of course," admits Roland.

"Kids, too?" goes on Inez.

"Oh, why go into all that?" protests Roland.

"If I can't go around a little with—"

"How many?" breaks in Inez.

At which Roland turns sulky, so wife supplies the vital statistics. "Three we have," says she. "There's Henri, who is nine; and little Roland, almost six; and Baby Rosie, who is crying because her papa don't come home for dinner. So!"

"Huh!" says Inez, and I could tell by the way her mouth corners straightened out that for once she was losing that placid poise.

I could imagine, too, that Inez was deeply

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shocked, for in spite of all her easy ways she still has a lot of good old-fashioned ideas. But what she meant to do about it I couldn't even guess. So I gave Barry's arm a gleeful pinch and stood one side.

"Huh!" says Inez, making it more of a snort than before. "And you would come here calling me your star-eyed goddess, and your cherry-bell; and take me to shows, and little suppers, and taxi riding in the park! You, with family at home! Loafer! I'll show you."

She did. Inez was at it almost before we knew what she was up to. And she doesn't swing a mean left, either. Not with her fist. Just open-handed cuffs, but they landed on Roland's jaw good and solid.

"That for Henri!" says she, with the first smack. "And this for the young Roland! And one for Baby Rosie! And another for the wife! There! Now maybe you take care who you get fresh with next time."

And all Roland could do was stand there and take it. He did wriggle some, and try to cover up with his arms, but there was no pulling loose from that right grip of Inez's, and her left crashed through any guard he could put up.

As for Marie, she watched admiring. "How wonderful to be so strong in the hands!" says she. "Ha! He would pick a beeg one. Now I shall

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know how to feenish when I get him home. Come you!" And she grabbed him by the ear.

"Just a minute," says I. "Roland was telling us that he was in business on Broadway. I don't care for the number, but I'm curious to know just what his line is. Importer, maybe, or broker?"

"Heem!" says Marie. "He is head barber in Max Girard's shop, where I am manicure."

"Gosh, Inez!" says I. "What a blow! And you had him all framed up as some excess profits vice-president, didn't you?"

"Maybe," says Inez, hunching her shoulders careless. "If I did I get him unframed. Hey?"

"Isn't it great, Barry," says I, as Marie and Roland faded from the scene, "to have a disposition like that?"

"What impresses me most about Inez," says he, "is her wallop."

"Then why didn't you shake hands with Roland before he left?" says I. "That's where you two seem to agree."

Which prompts Barry to give me one of those chummy smiles of his.

"You're a good pal, Trilby May," says he.

"I accept the nomination," says I.

Then we closed up the Cave and called it a day.

Chapter XIII

A Line On Aunt Luella

I SUPPOSE we did have rather a wild crowd in the Cave that evening. Especially after the send-off dinner to Daddy Gill got well under way. Zenas Gill, the landscape painter, you know. He had wound up his summer art class early, and had come down from his place in Connecticut to go abroad for a few months, and about a dozen of his students had trailed along to work up this going away affair as a slight token of how well he stood with them. Judging from the way they went to it he must be more or less popular, too.

Anyway, that's the idea the committee left with me when they came around early in the afternoon to make the arrangements. "He's just an old dear, Daddy Gill is," explained one of the girls to me, "and we want to give him a good time." So I rustled up some dinner favors, and bags of confetti, and a few gas balloons, and decorated one of the big tables. Of course, Daddy Gill turns out to be a gentle-mannered

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old bach with a straw-colored Vandyke, and mild eyes, and the boys and girls were mostly young people from small towns who didn't take their paint daubing or anything else very seriously.

Yet when they got on the fancy paper caps, and started to pepper each other with confetti, and began tying up Daddy Gill's whiskers with pink ribbons, and broke loose with occasional bursts of song, they might have looked more or less riotous to an outsider. The four young chaps from the General Electric offices tried to join in, from the next table, and weren't altogether discouraged. Then there were the usual commuter delegations, seeing Greenwich Village for the first time, and ready to take a hand in any kind of merriment that was going.

I'll admit I like to see a lively lot having dinner. It's good for business, for one thing; and then again, they're not so apt to notice that the chicken is tough or the service slow. Also, it helps keep Inez from yawning, which is the last thing a White Goddess ought to be caught at in her official capacity. That is, not if she means to put the proper amount of pep in her act. And you know I have to jog Inez up occasionally, as she sits there behind the cash register. She's apt to slump on the throne, if you get me.

"Say, dearie," I have to tell her, "you know this is no Sleeping Princess stunt you're sup-

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posed to be pulling. Come now; chin up, shoulders back. That's it. Bright and snappy, or else some one will get past you without cashing in."

But I didn't have to prod her any on this particular evening. No. There was too much going on. Especially when the art students got to singing, "I'm a Wild Prairie Flower," and drinking a ginger ale toast to the health of General Boom-Boom. Then the commuters and out-of-town buyers knew they were getting their money's worth. Absolutely.

"Talk about your merry villagers; eh, Inez?" says I.

"Lotta cut-ups," says she.

"But all quite innocent and harmless gaiety," says I. "It's lucky we're so far back from the street, though, or some of these old Ninth Warders would be siccing a raiding party on us. I should say that a good time was being had by all."

"Except one," says Inez. "See? Her by the corner."

Sure enough, I had overlooked this high-chested, straight-haired female, with the sharp nose and the narrow-guage eyes. You could tell by the puckered seams of her shirtwaist and the millinery atrocity pinned to her iron-gray hair, that she must have drifted in from the cheese and doughnut belt. She was alone, too, which wasn't so surprising when you considered the

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firm set to her jaw and the sour sag to her mouth corners. Somehow that kind generally are alone, or ought to be. Unless they're running an orphans' home or a retreat for wayward girls. You've seen the type, I expect.

She's finished her dinner, all but the demitasse of black coffee, which she has pushed scornfully to one side. And now she is sitting back, with her sensible heels planted squarely on the floor, and a cold, disapproving look in her bright brown eyes. Also there was a critical tilt to her nose.

"You're right, Inez," says I. "That old girl is feeling the need of shock absorbers. But why she insists on sticking around when her pure soul is getting such rude bumps is a puzzle to me. I wonder if I hadn't better ease her out into the street before she blows a fuse?"

That was my friendly notion when I wandered over to her corner and asked, casually, if the dinner had been all right.

"I didn't mind it," says she. "I have an excellent digestion and I seldom suffer from ptomaine poisoning."

"That's comforting," says I. "Have your check, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," says she. "Highway robbery I call it, asking that much for a mess of outlandish food."

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"Thanks for the compliment," says I. "Did somebody rope you and drag you in here against your will?"

"They did not," says she. "I came here for a purpose, young woman. Will you kindly tell me who manages this—this resort?"

"I'm one of the guilty parties," says I, "and my accomplice in crime is Inez, who poses as The White Goddess over there, under the black velvet canopy. Go on. Serve the subpœna."

"Humph!" says she. "So this is the place where my nephew spends so much of his time, is it?"

"Which nephew?" says I. "Has he got a name?"

"Certainly he has," says she. "I presume you know it well enough, too. His name is Barry Platt."

"Oo-Oo, la-la!" I gasps. "Aunt Luella!"

For I'd heard Barry mention her several times. Generally it would be Sunday night, just as we were starting for somewhere, and Barry would stop suddenly in his tracks, groan deeply, and remark: "Oh, curse! I forgot to write to Aunt Luella last night." And once he had told me something about her. He had lived with her ever since he was nine, when his mother had died and his father had gone to British Guiana with a rubber concern and had never come

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back. She lived up state, somewhere—Utica, I think.

He had added that Aunt Luella was a widow with a trunk full of interest-paying bonds and a gloomy, old stone mansion, furnished tastefully in the early McKinley period. Also that she was a good old soul who gave libera'ly to foreign mission funds, but couldn't be induced to unbelt for much of anything else. Between the lines I gathered that she had an inquisitive disposition and a suspicious nature. She looked it. More than that, she listened that way.

"Barry has mentioned this place several times in his letters," says she. "That is why I came down. I wished to see for myself."

"Yes?" says I. "Getting an eyefull, are you?"

She nods vigorous. "I thought it could not be a proper place, from the very name," says she, "but I had no idea it was such a den of iniquity."

"Ouch!" says I. "Right in the reputation. Say, if you can control the shudders long enough, maybe you'd point out some of this iniquity stuff. I'd like to see it."

"If you are too hardened to observe for yourself, young woman," says she, "I will. For instance, there are all those shameless girls who are carrying on with those young men."

"You mean they're making a lot of noise?" I asks.

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"I mean that two of them are smoking cigarettes and all of them have their faces painted," says Aunt Luella.

"Faces!" says I. "So they have. How old fashioned! But you know that the real modern flapper doesn't waste rouge and powder on her cheeks now. Not at all. She puts it on her knees."

But auntie simply stares at me as though I'd told her a whopper. "There's no sense in that; none at all," says she. "Knees!"

"Oh, perhaps they're not rolling 'em in Utica," says I.

"Cigarettes?" says she.

"No, socks," says I.

And while she was getting her breath I slipped off to see whether the commuters were going to have cheese or ice cream. But minutes later she held me up again.

"I suppose that creature with the bare arms and shoulders—the one behind the desk—is Inez?" she demands.

"Miss Inez Petersen, to be exact," says I. "Like to meet her?"

"No, thank you," says Aunt Luella. "I presume it is she who has infatuated my poor nephew?"

"Well, you wouldn't guess it was me, would you?" says I.

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Auntie doesn't even have to look me over again before shaking her head. "Really, you know," she goes on, "you do not look as though you were wholly depraved."

"Oh, now!" says I. "No flattery."

"I speak from experience," says she. "As a member of our church Guild I have done much work among the lower classes. I am chairman of the committee for improving the condition of factory girls. We conduct evening classes for them—embroidery and sacred music and the history of art. And, really, I have found some of them quite responsive."

"Isn't that nice!" says I. "But I doubt if I'm that kind."

"Never despair," says Aunt Luella. "You seem rather a bright young person. Tell me, what is your name?"

"That's the worst part of it," says I. "I'm Trilby May Dodge."

"Trilby!" says she. "An abandoned character in a dreadful old book of fiction, which I was not allowed to read when I was a girl. What an unfortunate choice of names!"

"Yes," says I. "Maw wanted to call me Arabella, after a parlor car; but Paw held out for Trilby, and for once he had his way."

"And you were brought up in—in these slums, were you?" asks auntie.

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"Not exactly," says I. "I was born near Danbury, Connecticut, but soon after that Paw took me out into the woods of Minnesota. Never heard of Tamarack Junction, did you? Well, I lived within three miles of there until two years ago. And I've been in Greenwich Village exactly five weeks. So has Inez."

"Shocking!" says auntie. "But have you made no effort to get back to the pure, simple life of the country?"

"Nary an effort," says I. "It wasn't so simple, you know, as it sounds. I had to do most of the work for a family of nine. And the stepmother I left didn't add much to the purity of the place. Hardly. You ought to see Maw Dodge once when she was well liquored up on home brew. Say!"

That got a shudder out of Aunt Luella. But she's a consistent reformer. "Still," she goes on, "you might try to lead a different life from this. And you should use your influence to get this Inez person to strive for better things."

Which was about all I could stand from this old girl with the acetic acid smile and the bradawl eyes. "Say, you're a dream, you are!" says I. "Listen, auntie; you have a mind that needs chloride of lime on it. Uh-huh! One of the kind that could find a rotten spot in a glass apple. Who gave you the hunch, anyway, that you were

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so much better than anybody else? Where do you get that holier-than-thou stuff? And how do you know you're qualified to tell other people what they ought to do? Say, remember this; if you don't like the place, you're not locked in here. The exiting is good any time you care to try it."

Which few heartfelt remarks had her tinted up so she was purple clear back of the ears. "Such brazen impudence!" says she. "But I'll have you know, young woman, that I came here to find my nephew, and I shall stay until he comes."

"Help yourself," says I. "Barry'll be delighted, I don't think."

Honest, with all that off my chest, I felt a lot better. So when I discovered this queer-looking old sport with the shifty eyes peeking cautious through the alley door I was almost cordial to him.

"Well, mister," says I, "who do you guess you're sleuthing?"

"S-s-s-h!" says he. "Come here a minute, will you?"

Course, he did have on a loud fancy vest, and his renovated Panama had a rakish tilt to it; but there's a friendly twinkle in those restless eyes of his, and he's such an inoffensive looking, middle-aged party otherwise, that I took a chance on stepping out into the alley.

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"What's the scandal?" says I.

"He-he!" he chuckles. "You've said it. Say, ain't you noticed a lady with a pointed nose and sharp eyes and a hat with a big jet buckle on it in there?"

"One with grayish hair and a high chest and a mouth that looks as if she was sucking lemon drops?" I asks.

"That's her!" says he.

"You mean Aunt Luella Platt, of Utica?" says I.

"Dumbed if I don't!" says he, enthusiastic. "She's the very one."

"Friend of yours?" I asks.

"Friend!" says he. "Say, she's nobody's friend, Luella Platt ain't. Nor ever was. It ain't in her. Just a meddlesome old gossip, she is, that hates other folks for merely being alive."

"Sounds like a close and intimate description," says I. "You must know her fairly well."

"Ought to," says he. "We grew up together. And there was a time when we were both young fools, that we—well, we were kind of thick. I dunno as I can tell you all, young lady."

"Don't," says I. "Always leave something for the imagination. Anyway, it was such a hectic affair that you never quite got over it and are still trailing Luella around to see that no harm comes to her. That it, eh?"

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"Couldn't be much wider," says he. "I'm just as crazy over Luella Platt as I am over having a back tooth pulled. She cured me of that years ago, and what she hasn't done to me since—"

"Say, if you could sketch it out briefly," says I, "perhaps I'd get the idea better. Let's see, you are who and what?"

"Lem. Snyder," says he. "And I did run one of the niftiest gent's furnishing shops in Utica until Luella got in her fine work. You see, old man Platt was a mortgage and loan hound, and when he checked out she was left with a lot of commercial paper, carrying all the way from 10 to 20 per cent. Among the collection was some notes of mine. You'd 'most thought, too, that she wouldn't have pushed me very hard, for old times' sake. But say, the very first time she got me in a tight place blamed if she didn't jump on me with a judgment and get me sold out. Since then I've been clerkin' in the place I used to own. Twelve years I've been at it."

"Well, that ought to satisfy her, I should think," says I.

"You don't know Luella, then," says Mr. Snyder. "Seems as if she'd sort of curdled against me. Afraid I'd talk, I expect. So she beat me to it. I don't think she's ever missed a chance in the last dozen years to give me a

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knock. You know, spreadin' gossip. Why, some of the tales she peddled around among the old hens she's chummy with would get me run out of town if everybody believed 'em. Mighty near lost me my job twice, as it was. Not that I'm any saint. I do travel around with a bunch of live ones, I'll admit. And now and then we have some gay parties. But it's nobody's business, as I see. I ain't married, and if I drop a week's salary on poker, or blow it in giving some young lady a good time, I'm the only one that's out. But let Luella get hold of a hint and she'll make the worst of it. Honest, I ain't got enough reputation left to swear by, thanks to her, and when I saw this chance to get square—"

"What chance?" I puts in.

"Why," says Snyder, "her being off on a little spree of her own. I just got onto it by accident. You see, I happened to be down here on a buying trip for the boss. Didn't dream she was in town, too, until this afternoon I saw her at the hotel desk and overheard her asking how to get to Greenwich Village and where to find the Cave of the White Goddess joint."

"Odd you should pick out the same hotel," I suggests.

"Oh, I don't know," says he. "It's a small one on West Forty-seventh Street that's run by Utica people, and most of our folks patronize it

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when they come to New York. Makes us feel more at home, you know. Anyway, that's how I got a line on Luella, and now I want to know what she's up to."

"Sorry," says I, "but she's only sleuthing after her nephew, Barry Platt."

"Oh, is that all?" says Lem. disappointed. "I was in hopes—"

"Say," I breaks in, "perhaps it can be arranged, after all. She'd be rather surprised if you should walk in on her here, wouldn't she?"

"I'll bet she would," says he.

"Then wait," says I. "Barry isn't here yet, but there's a friend of his in there who— Well, I'll see what can be done and you stick around until I give you the signal."

Perhaps I haven't mentioned Barry's roommate up at Miss Wellby's. Well, it's hardly necessary, for if you give Mr. Hamilton Burr Wright only half a chance he'll mention himself. Incidentally, too, he'll admit being the shiftiest automobile salesman north of Columbus Circle, quote figures to prove it, and be calling you by your first name inside of ten minutes. "I don't persuade 'em," is Hammy Wright's slogan. "I hypnotize 'em. Yeah-uh! Put the spell on them. That's my method. I can sell any old make of car. Just give me a chance to put over my siren song and I'll unload a mortar mixer on

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a hard-boiled plute who's looking for a Rolls-Royce. That's me."

And Hammy was in there, then, sipping his second cup of chickory blend, smoking his fifth cigarette, and watching the art students with a bored eye. It took me less than three minutes to sidle along, explain to him the plot of the piece concerning Aunt Luella and Lem. Snyder, and suggest that he help out.

"Just tell her you're a friend of Barry's and go to it," says I. "Improvise all you want, only fix up a nice sporty scene for Mr. Snyder's entrance."

"Trust me," says Hammy, indulging in a grin.

Really, though, I didn't know how good he was. I'd heard he was a smooth performer; not only from him, but from Barry. But say, he would have the king of a wire-tapping gang looking like an amateur. I saw him saunter over casual, stop as though he was surprised, smile, and then start telling Aunt Luella all about it.

The next time I glanced their way Hammy Wright was sitting close beside her, one arm draped over the back of auntie's chair, and he was evidently remarking what a stunner she must have been only a few years ago. Judging by the simper on the old girl's face, it was something like that. Two minutes later and he'd induced her to join him in another demi-tasse.

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I brought them. It was then I heard him explaining how mild his cigarettes were, and urging her to try one, just for the experience.

"Come, now," he was saying, "you don't want to be a back number, do you? And what harm will a few puffs do? Everyone does it when they come to the Village. It's a part of the show. Here! Just try this."

I waited until I'd seen him strike the match and then I dashed for the door. Who should I find talking with Lem. Snyder but Barry Platt.

"Good work!" says I. "Everything is all set for the reunion. Crash right in, both of you."

I expect I gave them a push, too. Anyway, they landed in front of the corner table just as Aunt Luella was waving the cigarette in one hand and wiping the tears from her eyes with the other. Not having been prepared, it was a genuine jolt for Barry.

"Why, Aunt Luella!" he gasps. "You!"

"Gosh!" says Lem. Snyder.

And when she saw them both standing there staring at her, I thought for a minute that she was going to do a back somersault over the chair. But after she had stopped choking from the mouthful of smoke she had swallowed, she straightened up, and turned to Hammy.

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"You—you tell them, Mr. Wright, just how it happened," she begged.

"Huh!" says Lem. "You don't need to tell me. I've seen enough. And I'm goin' back to Utica on the midnight."

"Don't you dare, Lem. Snyder," she spluttered, "until you've heard—"

But Mr. Snyder was already half way to the door, and he never stopped.

Meanwhile I'd had a chance to give Barry a nudge. He's quick at picking up a cue, too.

"Really, auntie," he protests, "I didn't quite expect this of you. How long have you had the habit?"

And the more she tried to explain the sadder grew the shake of Barry's head, until finally she lost her temper completely and told him what a young wretch he was. But somehow the lecture on his morals and wicked habits was permanently sidetracked. She wouldn't even allow him to take her back to her hotel.

"No, thank you," says she. "I think Mr. Wright will do that for me. He understands me much better than you seem to, Barry. And what I meant to say to you I shall put in a letter. Good night."

She was still purplish in the neck as she marched out, and she rewarded me with a parting glare.

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“Charming disposition, eh?” says Barry, nodding after her.

“But outside of that,” says I, “she’s a perfectly nice aunt. I do hope she comes again—when I’m out.”

Chapter XIV

Inez Applies the Acid Test

IT'S a shifty little old world, I'll say. Not that it looked it on the 29th. No, I remember I was wondering that afternoon if Inez and I would still be running a joint in Greenwich Village, say twenty or thirty years from then; and how I would look with gray bobbed hair. For that was the prospect. We seemed as well anchored and as fixed as the Washington Arch or Sheridan Square.

I'd been figuring up our first month's profits from The Cave of the White Goddess. I hadn't got it quite straight, for bookkeeping isn't one of the best things I do, but with a little free-hand juggling of expense items I'd managed to strike a balance that didn't wobble much unless you handled it rough. You see, Uncle Nels had let us have the place on a salary and commission basis, and I was planning to send him a nice little surprise. It would have to go through Barry Platt, I supposed, as the old boy hadn't been near us since that first night, but maybe

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Barry would bring us back some kind words. For they looked rather good, those figures.

And then the door creaked, and in trickled Uncle Nels himself. He's spruced up quite a lot, for him. Of course he's still baggy about the knees, and there's the same slump to his shoulders; but he's had his face and neck shaved, he's sporting a new rubber collar, and he's discarded the faded old lumberjack's cap for a bargain straw hat that rests secure on his ears.

But he isn't alone this time. Trailing behind is a wide-faced party with a button nose and a Cordovan tan complexion. A heavy set, youngish sort of person who sways from the knees up as he walks and wears his bullet head well forward, as if he was prepared to butt his way through something. And there's no doubt about his having hailed from near Stockholm originally.

"Where's Inez?" demands Uncle Nels.

"Oh, she's upstairs," says I. "As usual, she's getting ready to go to a movie matinee."

Uncle Nels shakes his head. "Movies in daytime!" says he.

"It's then or not at all," I explains. "She has to hold down the Goddess throne all the evening, you know."

"Huh!" says he. "Foolish! Girls should work

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or—or get married.” And with that he nods decided at the stranger. Somehow that gave me a hunch.

“Eh?” says I. “Is this a candidate?”

“This,” says he, with an elbow gesture, “this Cap’n Knute Olsen. Friend of mine. Nice young feller.”

It might be an accurate description and it might not. I’ve seen ’em younger and I think I could pick one nicer with my eyes shut. Personally I wasn’t crazy about the airplane ears, or the way his nose finished, or the stupid look in the baby-blue eyes. Perhaps Uncle Nels got a hint of all this, for he adds:

“He makes good man for Inez.”

“Yes?” says I. “What’s he captain of?”

“Tugboat,” says Uncle Nels. “But maybe he gets big freight steamer, Rio and Argentine line. I own shares in some.”

And that seemed to sketch out the whole plot of the piece as clear as if he’d talked for an hour. He’s pretty well set in his mind, Uncle Nels is, and ever since we’d found him he hasn’t seemed satisfied that Inez was indulging in her share of manual labor. You remember how it was when he bought The Cave for us. He did it because he had the cute idea that his husky niece would do the cooking, or the dishwashing at least. Not being able to wish any real work on her, he had

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switched to this new scheme. He would marry her off.

Well, that might not be such a bad move, either. I should miss her a lot, of course, but I couldn't see that it was going to spoil my whole life. Besides, maybe it was just what Inez would like, once she got into it. As the blushing bride of a freight-boat captain she would probably travel around a lot. Rio and the Argentine! Perhaps to Japan and China! And for a girl like Inez this Cap'n Knute might be the ideal hubby. Neither of 'em would talk the other to death, anyway.

"Say, I think you've said something now," says I. "Sound and steady, is he?"

"He's nice feller," insists Uncle Nels.

I took another look at the captain. He did seem substantial, especially about the legs and through the chest. Wore his cheek bones a bit high, it was true, and the lower part of his face tapered off kind of abrupt at the chin, like a piece of pie; but those were mere details.

"Yes," says I, "I should say he might do. I'll help you fix things up."

Which was where Cap'n Knute breaks his spell of silence. "Aye— Aye lak to see your Inez first," says he.

"Oh, naturally," says I. "You're not going to be rushed to the altar on any sealed-bid propo-

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sition. Then there's Inez to be considered, too. You've got to convince her that you're the only guy."

"Huh!" grunts Cap'n Knute, swelling out his chest and going through other motions peculiar to the conquering male.

"Yes, I understand," says I. "You rather fancy yourself, don't you? I take it that the girls you've met so far have been in the habit of making a fuss over you without any preliminaries. Those water-front belles would. And you're an impressive and important party—on your tug boat. You snap your fingers for somebody to come, and he comes. You yell to a deckhand to stick out a bow line, and it's stuck out. But you're going to find Miss Inez Petersen quite a different personage."

"Hey?" says he, staring at me, stupid.

"Absolutely," says I. "You see, she's more or less decorative and easy to view, Inez is. She has knocked around quite a bit in the last year or so, and she's met a good many men who have stopped for a second look at her. Some have told her what a stunner she was, and nearly all have signalled as much with their eyes. Not that Inez has always noticed it. She's no heavy-weight vamp. But she has a romantic disposition. Uh-huh! She's kind of worked up an ideal hero of her own, and as near as I can

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judge, captain, he doesn't resemble you in the least."

Cap'n Knute shrugs his shoulders careless and turns to Uncle Nels. "What's the use, then?" says he. "I no care. Plenty girls."

"You wait," says Uncle Nels. "Inez do what I tell her."

"Now, listen, Uncle Nels," says I. "You're all wrong. Inez isn't the kind that you can tell much of anything to. Not in that tone of voice. She's got a balky streak in her that would make a green mule seem like a trained seal. If I wanted to block this little scheme of yours I'd just let you steam ahead along that line. But I want to help. And I'm telling you that Inez has got to be humored at the start."

"What we should do?" demands Uncle Nels.

"Handle her easy, kid her along," says I. "She'll be down presently. Now, my advice to the captain is, that he should blow her to the best movie show on Broadway—loge seats, a lot of mixed chocolates for her to browse on between reels, and a ride home in a taxi."

Uncle Nels groans. "Expensive," says he.

"That's our middle name," says I. "But it's the only way to get anywhere with us. We get over it later on, though. I think Inez will. Just now she may have a passing notion that she wants to acquire the limousine habit, but once



"BUT—BUT MISTER FAIRBANKS HE WAS SHOOTIN' GUNS, AND—AND PUSHING VILLAIN IN FACE, AND MAKING LOVE TO LOVELY LADY," INSISTS INEZ. "AND HIM, HE SNORE? THAT CAPTAIN. HUH!"



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she get hooked up with the right sort of man she'll settle down and develop domestic instincts that will surprise you. Anyway, that's my guess, and I should say she'd be worth working for."

"I dunno," says Cap'n Knute, "Aye lak to see her."

He had his wish, for about then she appears, all gussied up in a new dotted Swiss and a wide-brimmed shadow hat to match, and her best gray silk socks. Nothing that can be rubbed in with chamois or laid on with a brush could produce a complexion like that, either, with the rose pink blending into the snow white, and changing places like the colors in an electric sign.

And you should have seen the chesty expression on the captain's face fade out and gradually give place to a frank Scandinavian gawp. From the very first Inez had him going. He took her all in from the generous ankles to the bulging ear puffs that she's learned to make out of her wheat-colored hair, and after that he was a changed man. He got as fussed as a kid when he was introduced, his feet interfered when he stepped up to shake hands, and he suddenly discovered that he didn't know what to do with his big paw after Inez had let go of it. He'd seen Inez, and he was hers.

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But Inez wasn't his yet. Not by several jumps. She inspected him calm but critical, and tucked in a fresh cud of gum. Of course, she did drop her chin a bit and go through the usual coy motions, but I could tell that she was just wondering why Uncle Nels had lugged in a stranger and how long they were going to hang around.

Twice Uncle Nels nudged Cap'n Knute in the ribs, and then said it himself. "Cap'n Olsen," says he, "he—he wants you to go to movies."

"Hey?" says Inez, brightening up. "Movie show! When?"

"Right away," says I. "All set, aren't you? Then you're on your way. Better take the subway or you'll miss the news reel. By-by!"

And by giving the captain a gentle push I got 'em started without any more stalling around.

Uncle Nels watched them with a satisfied look in his shrewd eyes. "That's all right, too, I guess," says he.

"It opens well, anyway," says I. "But let's understand about this freight steamer job for him. Is this an out-and-out promise, or just a hope?"

"Sure, I get him steamer," says Uncle Nels. "He's good feller, Cap'n Knute. I know his father in Sweden."

"Then here's trusting that he and Inez get

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along well on their try out," says I. "They'd make good running mates if they could hit it off."

"How soon you can tell?" asks Uncle Nels.

"Depends on whether or not Cap'n Knute is a fast worker or a slow one," says I, "but after a whole afternoon together we should be able to get some line on the affair."

"I think I wait," says Uncle Nels.

That seems to be the easiest thing he does. I wanted to find something for him to read, but he shook his head. Reading isn't in his line. I was afraid he'd want to poke around the place and ask fool questions. But no. He's quite content just to sit there in a hard chair, his washed-out blue eyes fixed steady on nothing at all, for three solid hours. So far as I could see he didn't even blink. Maybe he was thinking, but I doubt it. Half an hour of that would have given me the fidgets. I'm no sitter, though, and Uncle Nels is. Queer old boy. I don't get him at all. And how anybody with so much bone in the head as that could surround as much coin as he must have collected is a mystery. Got it in the lumber business. Maybe he planted pine cones and watched 'em grow up.

Anyway, while he sat there without hardly shuffling his feet or batting an eyelash, I checked over the accounts for a month, made out a whole

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sheaf of checks to be signed, copied off a dozen menus for the evening, and helped set up all the tables. Then, about five-thirty, I heard a taxi stop out front.

"This ought to be Romeo and Juliet," says I.
"Yes. Here they come."

But they didn't arrive blushing, or hand in hand. In fact, Inez came marching in alone, and I could see no gay, excited flicker, in those calm gray eyes.

"Well, how were the pictures, Inez?" I asked.

"All right," says she.

"Couldn't have been a Bill Hart feature, then," says I.

"No," says Inez. "Mister Douglas Fairbanks. Fine! He climbs up side of church and slides down other side into automobile."

"Oh!" says I. "Then there was a thrill in it. Did Captain Knute get excited, too?"

"Him!" says Inez, glancing scornful over her shoulder at the door.

"Well, let's know the worst," says I. "What did he do—laugh at the wrong place?"

"He go to sleep," announces Inez, indignant.
"Snore!"

"How indiscreet," says I.

"Why not sleep?" protests Uncle Nels.

"But—but Mister Fairbanks he was shootin' guns, and—and pushing villain in face, and mak-

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ing love to lovely lady," insists Inez. "And him, he snore? That captain. Huh!"

"Do I gather, Inez, that you and Captain Knute had words over his lack of enthusiasm for Mr. Fairbanks?"

"I don't say nothing to that man, Trilby May," says Inez. "Never. I—I don't want him comin' round any more. He—he's a wash-out."

"Sounds final and decisive," says I, as Inez starts toward the stairs. "I should say, Uncle Nels, that Captain Knute's little romance had been permanently scuttled."

"Wait!" calls out Uncle Nels, to her. "I give you one chance more. You say you don't like Cap'n Olsen? You no marry him?"

"Not until I go crazy in the head," declares Inez.

"Foolish girl!" says Uncle Nels. "You'll see. You go to work, you!"

And with that he shuffles out, shaking his head and mumbling to himself.

"Now I wonder just what he means by that?" says I.

"Huh!" says Inez. "No Uncle Nels can boss me. Say I should marry a movie snorer! No."

"I get your point of view, Inez," says I, "and I can't deny but what I sympathize somewhat. But that's a shifty old bird, your Uncle Nels,

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and his last remark listened ominous. I don't just see what he can do, though."

At least, nothing happened that evening. The Cave had the usual summer night's business, and when Barry drops in, as usual, he has no light to throw on the situation. He hasn't seen Uncle Nels for several days, but he expects to hunt him up in the morning.

He reports, though, that he couldn't locate him. And another day goes by.

"Uncle Nels talk in his hat, I guess," says Inez. "I no care."

It was only the next morning, though, that we were aroused early by hammering overhead and the jabbering of a gang of Dago laborers.

"Perhaps the owner is going to make studios out of the upper stories," I suggests. "They're always doing that to these old shacks."

But when I started out to investigate, half an hour later, I saw something that made me gasp. A lot of men were tearing off the roof of the building and taking out the upper window casings. I hustled around until I found the foreman.

"Say, what's the idea?" says I. "If it rains we may need that roof, you know."

"No you won't, miss," says he. "You'll be moving."

"Eh?" says I. "Why?"

"'Cause we're wrecking the building," says he.

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"Wrecking it?" says I.

"Yep," says he. "Inside of a week all there 'll be left will be a hole in the ground."

"But, my good man," says I, "you can't do that. We happen to be running a restaurant in the basement. You simply can't wreck the place over our ears."

"Can't, eh?" says he. "You watch us, girlie."

And that's as far as I could get talking to this low-brow. So I hurried in and found Inez calmly brushing her hair.

"Brace yourself, Inez," says I, "for I've got disturbing news."

"Yes-s-s," says Inez.

"They're taking the place apart," says I. "There's a wrecking crew on the job."

"How foolish!" says Inez, fixing an ear puff in position and patting it approving.

"What a help you are, Inez!" says I. "See if you can start breakfast while I try to get Barry on the phone."

I caught him at Miss Wellby's boarding house, and he says he'll be right down. He arrived about nine-thirty, as the last few slates came off the roof.

"Stop 'em, can't you?" says I.

"Fear I can't," says Barry.

"But I thought Uncle Nels held a lease on this place," says I.

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"So he did," says Barry. "But now he owns the building. Bought it day before yesterday. I only found out last night, when I got in touch with him. He said something about making some changes down here, but I had no idea he was going to start so soon. Let me have a talk with that foreman."

Five minutes later Barry came back with a blank look on his face. "The old fox!" says he. "He's made a contract for a rush job of wrecking. Bought off the other tenants, you know, and moved 'em out in twenty-four hours' notice. And so long as the basement lease is in his name there's nothing to be done. I don't understand."

"I do," says I. "He's peeved because he brought around a matrimonial candidate for Inez and she turned him down flat. This is a clever little scheme of Uncle Nel's for making her take the other choice—real work."

"He's losing all the money he put into buying out The Cave, though," says Barry.

"Yes," says I. "But I'm beginning to get a line on that old boy. He'll squeeze a dime until his thumb looks like a cameo of an eagle, but he'll toss away a check for a few thousand as easy as if it was a cigarette coupon. Especially when you touch that stubborn streak of his. There's only one answer to this, Barry; it's up to us to make a quick getaway."

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"If you could find another basement vacant," suggests Barry, "couldn't you open up there?"

"On a combined capital of what?" says I. "There'd be an advance payment on the lease, the moving expenses, three or four days out to fix up a new joint, and probably a month before our old customers found where we'd gone. No, I can't see it, Barry. I expect we've simply got to quit."

"The old pirate!" says Barry. "To spring it on you like this!"

"I know," says I. "But all along I've said that old boy was a trick uncle. Here comes Inez now. Watch how she takes it."

"Take what?" asks Inez.

"Oh, nothing much," says I, "except that your Uncle Nels has been up to mischief. Dirty work at the cross roads. We're evicted."

"Hey?" says Inez, never missing a stroke on the gum.

"It's a case of pack and git before night," says I. "He's bought the building and is having it pulled down. We're plumb overboard, Inez. At least, we're out in the street, with no more home than a couple of rabbits. And your soft career as The White Goddess is finished."

At which Inez merely hunches her shoulders. "So?" says she. "Oh, well, I get tired of this place. Seeing people eat all time. Fried chicken

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every night, and fresh guys gettin' gay when they pay checks. Huh!"

"But you know it means rustling another job," I suggests.

"Maybe we get some place where something goes on," says Inez.

"Yes," says I, "work, for instance."

"I no care," says Inez.

"Isn't that perfectly bully?" says Barry. "Invictus, eh? Mistress of her fate, captain of her soul, and—and all that sort of thing."

"I—I no like captains," announces Inez.

"No, she doesn't," says I. "Don't mention 'em again, Barry."

"But why?" he asks.

"They snore in the movies," says I.

And by four o'clock that afternoon we were back in a double room at Miss Wellby's with nothing definite looming in the future except a cold meat supper.

"Speaking of your dear Uncle Nels, Inez," says I, "I expect he's all right, in his place."

Inez blinks without saying a word.

"But between us," I goes on, "his place isn't on any map I ever saw. Eh?"

Chapter XV

Uncle Nels Gets His Turn

“WELL, Inez,” says I, after three days of job hunting, and no pay envelopes yet in sight, “we may be out but we’re not down, are we?”

“My feet hurt me,” says Inez, in that subtle way of hers.

“And that’s no trifle, either,” says I, “glancing at her 9D’s. “On the toes most, eh? I was sure it wasn’t fallen arches, or I should have heard the crash. As for me, I have blisters mainly on my disposition, with a few raw spots on my pride. Honest, Inez, I’m getting so I hardly have nerve enough to look an office manager in the eye.”

Of course, it’s right in the middle of the dull season. I wonder if Inez’s Uncle Nels figured on that when he put the skids under our Greenwich Village enterprise by buying the building and starting to tear it down without warning. Probably he did, for that old boy doesn’t miss many tricks.

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Anyway, we found ourselves clean overboard. Not that we just splashed wildly around and called for help. No. We hadn't made a single panicky motion up to date. I had promptly taken Inez by the hand and marched her up and down Broadway and side streets with both eyes wide open. We had tackled managers of restaurants, department stores, hotels, and beauty shops, admitting how good we could be in any line under consideration. We had even tried to ease into the chorus of a new girl show and asked to be put on as extras in Long Island movie studios.

But say, the demand for a cross-mated team of classy young lady assistants seems to be subnormal. Sometimes we couldn't even get past the office boy, and our high score was when we had our names taken by private secretaries who yawned and hung the slips on a hook.

So here the other night when we called in Barry Platt, the demon journalist, as a member of the strategy board, all I had to report was that we were up against it.

"New York doesn't seem to need us any more, Barry," says I. "It's a bit awkward, you know."

He's a cheerful soul, though, Barry Platt. He says we're bound to strike something soon, that business conditions will buck up in a week or so, and that I'm not to worry. "I don't believe

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Uncle Nels would stand by and let you really go hungry," he adds.

"Neither do I," says I. "He'd sit down to it. He's a hard old pill, that Uncle Nels person, take it from me. We've been talking him over, Inez and I, and we're off him for life."

But Barry shakes his head. "He has his good points," he protests.

"And I suppose one of 'em," says I, "is this passion of his for wishing real toil on his only niece? Cute, kindly little notion of his, eh? Say, where does he get that stuff?"

"Perhaps I can throw a little light on that," says Barry. "He's told me more or less about himself, you know. Has a lot of old-fashioned ideas, and this is one. You see, he always had to work hard as a youngster, and he believes other young folks ought to do the same. Girls especially. Or else get married and keep house."

"And because Inez wouldn't have the first bone-head tugboat captain he tows in," says I, "he hands us this deal. Doesn't even give us the regulation two weeks' pay that ought to go with a cold chuck out. Say, that's something I mean to tackle him for, Barry. I wish you'd hunt him up to-morrow and mention it."

"I've already mentioned as much," says he, "but it didn't seem to take."

"Then I'll put it up to him myself," says I.

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"I think I could be fairly eloquent on the subject. So if you'll just give me his new address—"

"Sorry," says Barry, "but I haven't the least idea where he moved to the last time. He's been calling me up at the office lately whenever he had anything to say about business affairs, and now that The Cave has been closed out I don't know when I'll hear from him again. Perhaps not at all."

"Huh!" says I. "There's your rich relation for you, Inez! Aren't you glad we came all the way from Duluth to hunt him up?"

Inez is leaning back placid in one of Miss Wellby's ancient front parlor armchairs, chewing her gum with a stroke as regular as a pump engine. "He's a poor fish, Uncle Nels," says she.

"Hardly a close description," says I. "He's a hard-boiled old sinner who plays a mighty shifty game. Keeps track of us, but don't let us get any line on him. Maybe he fancies himself as a man of mystery. What about it, Barry?"

"Yes, I should say he did," says Barry. "Appears to be a fad of his to keep his affairs to himself."

Somehow that got me propping my chin. It's a pose I do very well, just like the lovely young ladies on magazine covers when the artist wants 'em to register day dreams or girlish fancies. Only with me it indicates that I'm indulging in

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deep thought, such as whether I'd better try altering the skirt of my street suit or blow myself to a new outfit. But this time it had to do with Uncle Nels.

"Do you know, Barry," says I, "I'm getting curious about the old bird. Come to think him over, he has a lot of odd ways about him. Let's see, Inez, he must have started about on a level with the rest of your folks, didn't he? Wasn't rich when you first heard of him, was he?"

"No," says Inez. "Poor like us."

"And then, as I understand," I goes on, "he got in on some fat stumpage contracts—state school lands—and cleaned up a wad. After which he ceases to be a regular visitor at the old home, and the next you know he's disappeared, changed his name, and faded from view. It was only by a long shot, too, that we ran across him here in New York. And since then he's been flitting back and forth across our path like some foxy old bat at twilight. Is he still single, I wonder?"

Barry thinks he must be.

"But where and how does he live?" I asks. "And especially what does he do with all his money?"

Barry shakes his head.

"I know what he's going to do with part of it," says I. "He's due to let go of two weeks'

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wages as a forfeit for giving us such a swift release. That is, if I have any luck in trailing him down. Come now, Barry boy; you're more or less bright in the head. How can I get a line on him?"

Barry wrinkles his fair white brow and runs his fingers through his slick light hair, but produces no results.

"Where does he bank?" I asks. "Haven't you ever seen one of his checks?"

"Oh, I say!" says Barry, "that's an idea, you know. The Park National. And a friend of mine is a bookkeeper down there—Chick Wales. He could look it up for me. Might know without going to the books. Wonderful memory, Chick. Maybe I could get him on the phone now. He belongs to a little club downtown and generally takes dinner there. I'll have a try."

"Do," says I. "Tell him a long-lost niece wants to find Uncle Nels and plant a loving kiss on his bald spot."

"Huh!" says Inez, as Barry starts for the phone. "I don't go kissin' him, never."

"Mere figure of speech, Inez," says I. "Anyway, why be particular what you tell a bank clerk. He wouldn't believe you unless it was certified. And if I can locate Uncle Nels—"

"I no care where he is," breaks in Inez.

"Yes, I get you," says I. "But I do—about

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fifty dollars' worth. And here's Barry with news. I can see it in his eye."

Sure enough, he had the street and number. "Didn't I tell you Chick had a great memory?" says he. "He recalled the change of address. But what now?"

"A little sleuthing party, Barry," says I. "Want to be counted in?"

"Why, yes," says he. "Inez going, too?"

"No, I hardly think she'd be much help," says I. "Besides, she's not on good terms with her feet. Suppose we make it a twosome."

Which we did, and half an hour later we were interviewing a fuzzy-haired West Indian elevator juggler in the marble-tiled lobby of a big new Madison Avenue apartment house. No, he didn't know whether Mr. Nelson Swazey was in or out. We could put in a call at the phone desk.

"Oh, but we want to surprise dear Uncle Nels," says I. "Just shoot us up, Percey, that's a good fellow."

"Sure!" says Percey, swapping a grin for my crooked smile. "Ninth floor, number three."

But when we pushed the button at Number Three the door is opened only a crack by a stocky, red-faced young gent with a blond pompadour and a suspicious squint in his stupid eyes.

"What you want?" he demands.

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"We would like to call on Mr. Swazey," says Barry, polite.

"Who you are?" insists Squinty.

"Just old friends," says I.

He's some grand little outer guard, though. That don't convince him a bit. "Mr. Swazey got no old friends," says he. "He don't see nobody."

"But listen, old dear," says I. "We're not after the family jewels, or anything like that. We simply want to—"

That's as far as I got when the door slammed.

"Gr-r-r!" says I. "Some watch-dog Uncle Nels has there. All he needs is a spiked collar and a license tag."

"Anyway," says Barry, "his decision that we don't get in seems to be rather final."

"Still," says I, "I do hate to be shunted just by the hired help. Quite a substantial door, isn't it? Not even a transom. And I don't suppose you have a jimmy in your pocket; eh, Barry?"

"Looks as if we'd have to quit," says he.

"But now I am curious," says I. "Let's stick around in the hallway. We can let on to be waiting for the elevator if anyone comes along. Must be rather spiffy quarters the old boy has."

"I'm glad I don't have to pay a month's rent out of a year's salary," says Barry. "Let's see,

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this is probably an inside apartment, opening on a big court."

"Why the red light down at that end of the hall?" I asks.

"Fire exit," says Barry.

"Eh?" says I. "Fire escape? Say, I hadn't thought of that way."

"You don't mean to try getting in by that?" gasps Barry.

"Uh-huh!" says I.

"Why, Trilby May Dodge!" says he.

"Oh, I know," says I. "He might accuse me of breaking and entering, or trespass in the first degree, or assault and robbery. But say, when I get real curious I don't stop for little things like that. You needn't mix in this if you're chilly below the ankles, but I'm here to call on Uncle Nels, and if the front door is blocked then I'm willing to take a chance on the back way."

"Of course," says Barry, "I can't let you do this alone. That hall window looks as if it was open."

It not only looked so, but it was, and a nice open-work iron platform ran directly across the building outside. I made the step up as gracefully as could be expected in a tight skirt, and Barry followed. We took a look down to the little fountain and dusty evergreens in the court

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below, and then glanced around at the rows of windows, some lighted, but most of 'em dark, for this class of tenants aren't the kind who use New York as a summer resort. Anyway, nobody seemed to be peeking out at us.

"Here are his windows, at the left," whispers Barry. "Lighted up, too. But the shade is pulled down."

I felt my way along until I was just outside the first window. "No screen," says I. "Now let's see how gently I can run up that shade."

"Oh, I say!" comes from Barry.

He isn't much on taking a chance. He's been brought up too careful, I expect. But I'm apt to do what comes into my head first and think it over afterwards. I slipped my hand over the sill, got a firm grip on the cord, and eased up the shade.

And at that, what I saw nearly made me let it go on the run. You'd never guess in a million years. Three bath tubs! It wasn't a regular bathroom, either. Too big for that. And otherwise furnished like a parlor; three or four stuffed chairs and a deep Davenport covered with linen slips, a mahogany table or two, and a baby grand piano.

But most of the furniture had been pushed into the corners, and there, in the middle of the room, were these three whaling big white porce-

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lain bathtubs, all connected with nickeled pipes, and all two-thirds full of water. Also, bending over the tubs were Squinty and Uncle Nels. I'll hasten to add that they were more or less clothed. Squinty had on the same white duck jacket he wore when he greeted us so coldly at the door. But Uncle Nels was in easy negligee. That is he had on his trousers and suspenders, but he was in his socks and had his shirt sleeves rolled up.

"What—what the deuce are they up to?" whispers Barry in my ear.

"Christening, baptism, or a swimming lesson, are my guesses," I whispers back. "Let's watch."

They seemed to be poking something around in the nearest tub, and very busy about it. Just what it was, though, we couldn't see, although I nearly got my head into the room in the attempt. Finally Squinty elbows Uncle Nels to one side and growls impatient: "Nah! You don't fix it like I told you."

"I do so!" protests Uncle Nels.

"I say no," Squinty contradicts. "Old herring head! Lemme show you."

"Herring head you!" comes back Uncle Nels. "Show, then."

At which Squinty reaches down and lifts out a toy boat about a foot long and proceeds to jiggle some of the machinery. Then he touches

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off a match and the thing starts whirring away merrily.

"See?" he demands.

"Well, well!" says Uncle Nels. "Make it sail. No, lemme do it."

"Ah, you!" says Squinty, giving him a shove. "Watch me."

At which I nudges Barry. "The boys don't get along very well, eh?" says I. "Ought to have more than one toy between 'em."

"They have," whispers Barry. "Look on the floor and tables."

Sure enough, on glancing around I could count more than a dozen model boats of all descriptions. Some were little sailing yachts, some were like battleships, and others were torpedo boats or submarines. All seemed to be mechanical toys. Hence the three bathtubs.

But the next thing we knew another squabble had started between Squinty and Uncle Nels. The old boy was insisting that it was his turn to sail the little steamer and Squinty was telling him he didn't know how to fix it right. Uncle Nels had made a grab at the boat and almost slipped into the tub. And the whole thing was so absurd that I just had to let out that chuckle. So before I knew it they'd both rushed over to the window and discovered us.

"Hah!" says Squinty. "That red-head girl!"

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"You're color blind, Percey," says I. "Natural henna."

"You, hey?" says Uncle Nels. "Trilby May! And Mr. Platt. You come to laugh at me, do you?"

"Well, you couldn't expect us to weep over an act like that, could you?" says I. "My, but you were funny when you nearly got ducked. And as long as we're here, you don't mind if we come in, do you? Thanks. Pile in, Barry. Say, what's the idea, Uncle Nels? Did you have 'em fix up this temporary yacht basin for you?"

"Should I put 'em out?" urges Squinty, who's been scowling at us, hostile.

"So you could hog the playthings, eh?" says I. "Say, Uncle Nels, who is this disagreeable blonde person who bosses you around so free?"

"He—he's Alex.," says Uncle Nels. "He was woods cook for me once, and when I find him on the docks here I hire him as man. But he—he get too fresh."

"I should say he did," I agrees. "Why don't you fire him, then?"

Uncle Nels shakes his head. "Nobody knows how to fix boats," says he.

"Pooh!" says I. "I'll bet Barry and I could make 'em go just as well. Go ahead. Give him the run."

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Uncle Nels hesitates. "You—you laugh at me," he objects.

"Honest we wouldn't," says I. "And we'd let you do the sailing all by yourself. It's a shame the way he bullies you, calling you names and all."

"Yes," says Uncle Nels, his washed-out blue eyes flashing. "Herring head! Say, Alex, you get out. Quick."

Alex grumbled, but he changed his coat and went.

"You—you think I'm foolish old man, eh?" says Uncle Nels, hanging his head sheepish and pointing to the tubs.

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "I've seen plutes spend their money on sillier things than toy boats. Chorus squabs, for instance; and buying flocks of limousines; and owning half a dozen homes. This can't be such an expensive fad, and if it's something you're crazy about—"

"I yust like to do it, that's all," he breaks in. "When I was a boy— Well, you don't understand."

"Go on," I urges. "Let's hear it, and maybe I will."

He doesn't seem to know whether to spill anything more or not. Sort of a pathetic old party he seemed, standing there with his chin down and his shoulders sagged, glancing wistful and

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half afraid from Barry to me. Of course, in his woolen socks and baggy trousers, and with that tin toy in his hands, he was absurd. But I couldn't help feeling a little sorry for him. Perhaps I gave him an encouraging smile.

"Well," he says, "when I'm a boy I don't play at all. Never. Back in Sweden, you know. All the time I work. In fish packery when I am only nine. Then I have to mend nets. By twelve years I am sent out in fish boat. We go at night—row on oars, bail water, pull in heavy seine. Winter and summer. No school, no play. So I run off to United States. I work in the woods—lumber camp. I save money. I get in business for myself. I have some luck. They say I get rich. So I quit. Now I am old man. I want to play and—and you laugh at me."

That's all there was to it, but honest, it got me gulpy in the throat. For a minute all I could do was to stand there and gawp at him. Then I walked over and patted him on the shoulder.

"No, Uncle Nels," says I. "Not since that first chuckle, when I didn't understand. But I get you now. And I'm not laughing. In fact, I never felt less like it. And we're strong for this boat stuff, Barry and I. We want to see how they all work, don't we, Barry?"

"Of course," says Barry.

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"And you're going to show us, aren't you, Uncle Nels?" I insists.

"Sure," says he. "But you—you must help."

"That's my front name," says I. "Let's start with one of the big ones. The battleship, eh?"

Say, you should have seen him go to it. Like a kid exhibiting his Christmas gifts. Inside of half an hour we had all three tubs full of the tin boats, chugging around, bumping into each other, and churning up the water. We had races and naval battles. And at times all three of us would be squatting on the floor tinkering the engine of some toy steamer that had gone balky. Uncle Nels got as excited as if he was maneuvering the Atlantic Squadron. His mild old eyes beamed and now and then he'd let out a shrill, piping laugh. It was some party.

"I buy new ones to-morrow," he says as we start to leave. "Maybe you—you come again."

"Absolutely," says I. "We'll bring Inez next time."

"She—she wouldn't laugh?" he asks.

"If she does we'll push her into one of the tubs," says I. "She'd make some splash, wouldn't she?"

And Uncle Nels actually indulges in a giggle.

It wasn't until I was nearly home that I remembered what I'd gone to hunt up Uncle Nels for.

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“What do you think, Barry?” says I. “With all the opening I had I never peeped about that fifty.”

“I shouldn’t worry about that, Trilby May,” says he. “My guess is that with the start you’ve got on Uncle Nels he’s going to shed fifties rather freely before he’s through.”

“I mean to do my best to help Inez train her uncle,” says I, “even if I have to suggest three more bathtubs.”

Chapter XVI

Sleuthing With Trilby May

"LISTEN, Inez," says I. "This is no time to pull that mule imitation of yours. I'll admit you do it well—too well as a rule. But for the love of Mary Pickford lay off it now."

And Inez replies eloquent with a slow roll of her gray eyes, as she shifts the spearmint cud from port to starboard. Which means that her mind is still in a plaster cast. But I'm quite used to going hoarse trying to make Miss Petersen see a point.

"I hope they never get you on a jury, Inez," says I, "for if they do, equal suffrage is going to get another hard jolt, and the Nineteenth Amendment isn't any too popular now."

"I don't wanna go see Uncle Nels," protests Inez. "That dumbbell!"

"Oh, come now!" says I. "Don't be too hard on the old boy, just because he has developed a fad for sailing tin steamers in a triple set of bathtubs. It's an innocent indoor sport, after all."

"Foolish," insists Inez.

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"I don't claim it's a highbrow pastime," says I, "like spinning a toddle-top, or fly fishing in a stocked lake, or playing bridge whist with grandmother. But why not overlook it? Just remember, Inez, that for the third time Barry Platt and I have retrieved this trick uncle of yours, and that at last we seem to have him where he will almost sit up and beg. With a little intelligent help from his favorite niece we could have him quite tame. True, he's a bit odd in his ways, and not much to look at, but the fact remains that he is a rich uncle. So let's go around and be nice to him while he's in the right mood."

"He ain't nice to us when he queers our good business, is he?" demands Inez.

Which brought us right back to the starting post, with no ground gained. More than ever, it seemed, I had Inez on my hands; and, with one hundred and eighty pounds of blonde balkiness as a handicap weight, I wasn't eager to tackle any extra hurdles. Yet it was just then that our friend Barry comes crashing in with complications.

"Why so wild in the eye, Barry?" I asks, as he pauses in his dash up Miss Wellby's front steps. "Have they made you London correspondent, or has the managing editor wished you good-by?"

"It—it's my aunt," says he. "She's very ill."

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"The one in Utica, who brought you up?" says I.

Barry nods. "They've sent for me to come," he goes on, "and I must catch the ten o'clock express. It's tough luck."

"Oh, well," says I, soothing, "perhaps auntie will pull through and be a lot better by the time you get there. They often do."

"But that isn't it," says Barry. "I've got to leave just as I'm working up a perfect whale of a news story."

"Why, you cold-blooded young brute!" says I.

"Don't say that, Trilby May," he protests. "You don't understand. Really, this is the biggest yarn I've ever had a whack at, and if I could only stay and land it I'd be in strong at the office. Oh, wouldn't I! Say, do you know what I've run across?"

"The missing witness in the Loudman divorce case?" is my guess.

"Better than that," says he. "I've located the Queen of the Coke Runners."

"Sounds like the title of an Eighth Avenue movie feature," says I. "Is this crook stuff such big news as all that?"

"What if the lady happens to be Princess Chu, niece of the Chinese Minister, and is playing her game right from the embassy?" demands Barry, whispering excited.

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"Does listen sort of thrilling," I admits. "How'd you come to dig up all that?"

"Just a lucky break," says Barry. "I was getting material for a Sunday special—a grind about the spread of chop suey joints—so I dropped into one of them on Forty-second Street for a plate of chow main and a little chat with the boss. While I was there in comes this zippy female with the slanting eyebrows, the high face coloring, and the pointed chin. I noticed how she had 'em all jumping around. Seemed to own the place. 'Who's all this?' I asked. Then the Chink confided that she was Princess Chu taking a little trip incog. 'Ah, feed that to some tourist slummer, Charlie,' says I. 'If she was a sure-enough princess she wouldn't be in a chow joint like this.' But he only hunches his shoulders and walks off."

"Well, was she?" I asks.

"Wait," says Barry. "Pretty soon I saw the boss open a big safe and take out a black suitcase—one of these classy, overnight bags. The lock was sealed with a big gob of yellow wax. He put it on the counter so that she could inspect it. Then she waved for a waiter to lug it down to a taxi. And as it was carried past I spotted a gold dragon painted on one side. The embassy mark, you know. But of course, all that might have been faked. So I went to a phone booth and

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called up Jimmy Gordon, who's been chief of our Washington bureau for years, but who's in town for a few days lay-off. He says there is a Princess Chu, all right, and that she's quite a lively girl. I gave him a tale about wanting to interview her on the short skirt craze, and asked how I could get in touch with her, so he told me who to wire and I got word back that the princess had left yesterday to spend the week end with friends in the Berkshires. Couldn't make much out of that, of course, and I might have dropped the whole thing if I hadn't drifted into our police headquarters' branch and found Chub Collins all stirred up over a rumor that the drug squad was on trail of a big shipment of opium that was said to have been recently smuggled in—nearly fifty pounds. It had been offered for sale by a young woman who looked like a Chinese. And she had it in a black suitcase! Well, there you are!”

“A case of putting two and two, eh?” says I. “Sounds simple enough. And that's quite a lot of opium, isn't it, Barry?”

“I'll say it is,” says he. “Why, it's enough to supply all the addicts in this section for a month, and it's worth— Well, I don't know how much; half a million, perhaps. And think of the row that will start when it comes out that this is an inside job, with a princess playing the

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star part. Wowey! That is, if I could stay to spring the story, which I can't. Very likely the act will be all over before I can get back and the lady will have disappeared. Isn't that just my luck?"

"But say, Barry," I suggests, "isn't there some one you could leave the tale with, and have 'em work it up while you're gone?"

"And have the other fellow get all the credit?" says Barry. "What's the use? No, I've just got to let my big chance slide. Besides, I haven't time to do a thing but pack my bag and hike for the station."

"You hadn't thought of putting me on as an understudy, eh?" I asks.

"You, Trilby May!" gasps Barry.

"What sublime confidence you have in me!" says I. "It's too touching. But really, you know, I'm not quite a dead one, Barry boy. I have occasional spasms of almost human intelligence. Of course, I'm no journalistic sleuth hound, such as Barry Sherlock Platt; but I can find my way about town without the aid of a hotel guidebook, and I might be able to follow a perfectly plain clue, especially when there's one of my own sex in the case."

"Oh, I say!" says Barry. "That's an idea. You might dig up something new about her. Anyway, maybe you could keep track of her if

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I told you just where to go. She'll probably show up again at the suey joint—perhaps tonight. That seems to be her headquarters. And from what I've told you about her looks—"

"Photographic," says I. "You're a vivid describer, Barry. I'm sure I'd know her. And I would like to help you out."

"You're a good pal, Trilby May," says he. "I—I've felt that all along. Somehow it seems as if— Well, you get me? Like that old evolution thing. You remember? 'When I was a king in Babylon, and you—'"

"No, no, Barry," says I. "When I was a Rolls-Royce limousine, and you were a flivver coupe."

Then we swapped giggles and Barry wrote down the number of the chop suey joint, and his Utica address.

"If it breaks big," says he, "you might wire me, and perhaps I could sneak off for a day or so. Be careful, though. Some of these Chinks are bad actors. Mustn't let 'em get onto you."

"Don't worry," says I. "I'm a shifty performer myself when I have to be. And I might take Inez along as a shock absorber. Hurry on now, and leave it to me."

As a matter of fact, I've always had an idea I could do this reporter stuff if I had a chance. Not the writing, maybe, but trailing down the

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facts. I've heard Barry tell how he had worked up the details of some of his stories, and it struck me he wasn't any too clever at it. Where he shines is dressing things up so they read well. He's a star at that. You ought to hear some of the one-act plays he's done. Anyways, some one ought to hear 'em; but up to date nobody has, I believe.

So while he piles into a sleeper bound for Utica, I gathers up Inez and starts for this Forty-second Street suey emporium.

"How you know I like that Chink stuff?" objects Inez. "I never tried it."

"Nor I," says I. "But we're billed to consume several samples of it before the evening is over, and I'm banking on you, Inez, to do the heavy gastronomy. It's your specialty, you know."

"Huh!" says Inez, indicating that she suspects I'm kidding her, but isn't quite sure.

"First, though," I goes on, "I must drop in for a minute on your Uncle Nels. I promised him we'd be around and he'll be looking for us. I'll have to give him some excuse. Let's go."

But at the swell apartment house where he has transformed a parlor suite into a toy yacht basin, the Jamaican elevator man insists that Uncle Nels has gone out. Somebody has called him no the phone, and he'd had a long talk with

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'em. Then he'd strolled out, not ten minutes before.

"When he comes back," says I, "tell him his niece was here and was all cut up at not seeing him."

"What a whopper!" says Inez, as we starts downtown.

"But one that will tickle the old boy," says I. "And after all, he's a lonesome old scout. Here's a Fourth Avenue car."

No trouble to find the chop suey joint. They light 'em up brilliant, don't they? And after we'd climbed the flight of marble steps and pushed through the wicker doors, we blinked for a minute as we gazed about. Hung from the ceiling were all sorts of fancy Chinese lanterns, and the room was well filled with little teak-wood tables. Business was light, though, for hardly a dozen people were scattered around. A Chink waiter with slick black hair and a wooden face was beckoning us to one of the front tables, and I was about to follow him when, down at the far end of the restaurant, I caught sight of some cozy little coops, like pews with high backs, facing each other across a table in the middle. And in one of 'em, toying with a queer-looking dish, was this liberally rouged female with eyes set on the bias. At her feet I could just see the corner of a black suitcase.

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"Gosh!" says I. "The very one."

"Hey?" says Inez.

"What Barry picks as a princess of the royal blood," says I. "See? The one parked in the slip."

"Huh!" says Inez, giving her the casual North and South.

"Precisely my sentiments," says I. "But let's ease ourselves into the adjoining pew and stretch an ear."

There wasn't much to be heard, though, for the mysterious female seemed to be just stalling around, not eating recklessly or noisily. We took a chance on ordering some of the weird things on the menu, and while we were waiting to be served I spotted this wall mirror opposite and discovered that by leaning out a little I could get a fair view of our neighbor. If the glass had been a bit cleaner I should have liked it better, but as it was, I made a few interesting notes.

In the first place I decided that those curving Oriental eyebrows must have been faked. The eye-corners looked as though they'd been touched up with a pencil, too; and I could guess that the high cheekbone effect was mainly due to make-up. It can be done with a little flesh pink and dead white rubbed in at exactly the right spots. Next I noticed her feet. She was no Cinderella,

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I'll tell the judge. Those strap pumps must have been 4B's at least, but the short vamps and the pointed toes made 'em look smaller. Both heels were run over on the inside. And up the side of the left silk stocking was a run that had been botchily darned.

"As a princess picker," I whispers to Inez, "our Barry is a good judge of nut sundaes. Still, she may be Queen of the Coke Runners, just as advertised. There's the black bag, all right. And here comes this low comedy Chink waiter with some trick food. Say, it looks like somebody had dropped a plate of goulash on two handfuls of excelsior. You try it, Inez, and if you don't develop spasms I follow along."

"Smells good," says Inez. And then, after she's tried a forkful, she announces that it tastes good. It did, especially after it was mixed with boiled rice and seasoned with black sauce from the vinegar cruet.

We were still busy investigating the food when the princess gets up, impatient, and walks to the phone booth.

"And she leaves the bag with a whole fortune's worth of opium, right here!" I comments. "That's what I call careless. Half a million, didn't Barry say? M-m-m-m! I wonder."

Also I figured that unless the lady had unusual luck it would take her five minutes or more

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to get the right number. Just about then, too, the boss of the joint and one of the waiters, were having a hot sing-song debate over a check, and the other pie-faced suey juggler was taking an order at the front end of the room. So I let my curiosity get the best of me. I used my boarding-house reach, stretched a hand into the next booth, and dragged the bag around where I could shove it under my feet.

"What for?" demands Inez, staring.

"I'd like to see what a chunk of opium worth that much looks like," says I. "Wouldn't you?"

"She'll be mad if she finds out," warns Inez.

"Naturally," says I. "But if she doesn't know she'll never worry a bit. Say, it is heavy, all right."

I found that out when I lifted it up on the seat beside me. Then I just had to finger the big gob of yellow sealing wax. It looked impressive, but when I tried the catch I discovered that it didn't seal the lock at all. It was simply stuck on the side. And before I knew it I had the bag open. Inside was this lump of black stuff, about as big as a ham and a half.

"So that's opium, is it?" I remarks.

"Looks like tar," says Inez.

"Eh?" says I, sniffing. "Why—why it smells like tar."

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"I can tell," says Inez. "I used to chew it, like gum."

"Wait!" says I. "Maybe I can pry off a piece. Let's have a fork. There! Think you've got nerve enough to test it, Inez? Careful, now! And for the love of life don't swallow any. Well?"

"Sure it's tar," says Inez. "Don't I know?"

"That's enough, then," says I. "Back it goes. Just in time, too. Here she comes."

So when the princess drifted back from the phone booth we were bent over our plates once more. She didn't even notice that the bag wasn't just where she left it, but pushed it under the seat with the toe of her pump and sat down to drum her fingers restless on the table.

"From the lady's motions," says I, "I should guess that somebody was late in keeping a date. I'd say they were wise, at that."

Then I noticed Inez gawping across at the mirror, as if she were watching a ghost.

"Well, spill it!" I tells her. "Who's coming now?"

Inez leans across and whispers, husky, "It—it's Uncle Nels!"

"What!" says I. "How in the name of Ouija could he know we were here?"

"It's her," says Inez, nodding toward the next slip.

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"Oh, come!" says I.

But a glance in the mirror showed that the lady had seen the new arrival and was perking up.

"Back in the corner, Inez," says I. "Don't let him see you. Quick!"

And Inez did manage to shift over so that most of her must have been hidden, while in the glass I could watch the old boy come poking forward to where the smiling princess was giving him the come-on signal.

Well, that gave me the whole plot of the piece. Nearly all of it, anyway. This phony princess of Barry's had evidently invented a new game. Instead of a gold brick or fake crown of jewels she was baiting the suckers with a tale about a great chunk of smuggled opium, and dressing it up fancy with all this about working through the Chinese embassy and being a member of the royal family herself.

But how she had happened to land a cagey old boy like Uncle Nels was a puzzle. With those shrewd blue eyes of his and the grip he has on a dollar you'd think he'd be the last one to fall for an easy money scheme that might lead to a session before the grand jury. You can't always tell, though. The more they have the more they want, and the ones with the simple, honest look, are often the very parties that believe anything is right that they can get away with.

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As it develops later, this con. lady had got Uncle Nels on her list through the door man at his swell apartment house. Seems they're often a crooked lot, these door men, who indulge in all sorts of pastimes, from petty graft out of taxi drivers to wholesale bootlegging. And this particular pirate had whispered to Uncle Nels how a certain Princess Chu was anxious to unload a fortune in smuggled coke at about one-tenth its value. He'd added that he would attend to selling it to the proper parties if Uncle Nels would finance the original deal by putting up a certified check for fifty thousand. And dear old Uncle Nels had promptly come nibbling around with his mouth watering and his fingers itchy.

Course, I could only guess at part of this from the scraps of low-toned conversation that came through the partition. The princess spoke of what she had in the bag as "the bonds," and assured Uncle Nels that they were all ready to deliver. Perhaps he wanted to see 'em. Certainly he should. And we heard the bag dragged out and set on the table. In the mirror I could even see Uncle Nels taking a peek. He seemed satisfied with what he saw, too. Anyway, he cocked his head on one side and looked wise, although I doubt if he's ever seen a piece of opium as big as a peanut before.

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"Well," said the princess, "you brought the check, did you?"

Uncle Nels feels in an inside pocket, and nods.

"Then we can trade, eh?" suggests the lady. "You'll have to make it snappy, though, for I gotta be back in Washington by to-morrow morning. Come across."

She was a crisp and easy worker, I'll say that for her. Uncle Nels acts almost as though he's hypnotized, for he nods again, and his hand was just appearing with the check in it when I slid out of our booth and around in front of the pair. Business of great astonishment on the part of Uncle Nels.

"Hey!" says he. "You here, Trilby May?"

"All the time," says I. "And your favorite niece, too. Come, Inez, pry yourself out and join the party."

As for the fake princess, she looks much annoyed. "Say, what's the idea?" she demands. "We're talking business here."

"Yes, I know," says I. "I've been listening in. Cute little proposition you've got, too. But say, I just want Uncle Nels to take a close look at a sample of what he's buying before the deal is closed. Show him, Inez."

And Inez holds out a fair hand with this cold cud resting in the palm, tooth marks and all.

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Uncle Nels stares at it, pokes it around with one finger, and then takes a sniff.

"Only tar," says he.

"Same as the lump in the bag," says I. "I can show you where I pried this piece off with a fork. See?"

He has fairly good eyesight, Uncle Nels. He saw the fork marks, and he smelled of the chunk in the bag. Then the hand with the check went back into his inside pocket.

"Ha, ha!" says I, grinning at the princess. "Foiled again!"

Perhaps I shouldn't have done that. She wasn't a good loser, this lady with the slanting eyebrows. And for a member of the Chinese royal family she surely could swear fluently in Manhattanese, with quite a marked Irish brogue. Also, she was inclined to make messy motions. The Chink boss came from behind the counter, and looked threatening, too. But I had my bluff all thought out.

"Listen, Inez," says I. "I'm going down to the front door to call in detective Cimonetti, and if any of those persons try to stop me I give you leave to use 'em as rough as you choose. Are you ready? Then here goes."

She's about as frail looking, you know, as a superdreadnaught; and when she sets her jaw that way and plants her feet wide she does ap-

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pear more or less hostile. Anyway, they didn't seem anxious to mix in. Also, how should they know that I didn't have a detective at the foot of the stairs? Perhaps that seemed the most probable thing in the world to the lady with the black bag. Almost before I had started for the stairs she was scuttling through a door at the rear, and the wooden-faced Chink was shuffling after her. For a speedy doubt exit it was quite a success. The first thing we know they'd both faded.

"Come, Uncle Nels," says I, "it isn't too late for you to show us that new toy steamer, is it?"

And it isn't until we're well on our way uptown in a taxi he insists on hailing that Uncle Nels makes his great confession.

"Trilby May—Inez," says he, taking each one of us by the hand. "I—I'm an old fool."

"Well, I wouldn't go as far as that," says I. "You're no Solomon, maybe, but I've seen worse. Besides, you were up against a smooth performer."

"You—you save me from losing lot of money," he insists.

"Oh, I expect you'd do as much for us," says I, careless.

But he shakes his head and goes on. "It's what I get for being selfish and living alone like I do. I get lonesome and I talk to strangers.

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Always they try to get my money away. I have big place where I live—eight, nine rooms. It's nice place, too. Why you and Inez don't come with me? Hey?"

He says it pleading and plaintive.

"For one thing," says I, "we haven't been invited before. And anyway, it all rests with Inez. She's your blood relation, you know. So it's up to her to say."

"You will, eh?" urges Uncle Nels.

But Inez isn't jumping at the offer. Other things than uncles count in her young life, and she wants to know about 'em.

"Could I go by movies?" she demands.

"Sure!" says Uncle Nels. "Maybe I get to like 'em myself. Theater plays, too, and Coney Island. We all have good times and I don't get lonesome any more."

Almost any girl but Inez would have been clapping her hands and beaming by then. Not Inez, though. She seldom beams. But as we drew up under the entrance light I saw a satisfied flicker in her big gray eyes.

"All right, we come," says she. "Maybe tomorrow. But I don't wanna see boats to-night. I'm sleepy."

And that was all the enthusiasm Inez let loose when this long hunt of ours for her rich uncle ended so happy. She yawned. As for me, I

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was never more wide awake. I felt as though I'd been shut in a room for a long time struggling with a locked door that wouldn't open, and that suddenly it had swung wide. I was free to step out into a broad, busy street. I wanted to cheer and shout. For of course I had no notion of settling down with Inez and Uncle Nels and going to the movies, for the rest of my life. Hardly. Not that I had any program. But now that I had landed Inez where she belonged, I knew I was free to make one.

"You sleepy, too, Trilby May?" asks Inez, as we climbs the front steps at Miss Wellby's.

"Just as sleepy as a kid starting for the circus, Inez," says I. "But don't let me keep you up. I've got to get off a letter to Barry Platt."

"What you tell him?" demands Inez.

"That he's a nice boy," says I, "but that as a princess connoisseur he's a piece of cheese."

"You—you no like Barry?" asks Inez.

"If I find out before morning," says I, "shall I wake you up and let you know? No, I thought not. Then suppose we just let it ride."

THE END





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